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**English Literature Series. No. 51.**

**LONGER NARRATIVE POEMS  
(NINETEENTH CENTURY)**



# Longer Narrative Poems

(Nineteenth Century)

*FIRST SERIES*

*Edited for Schools by*  
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## INTRODUCTION

### I. THE EVE OF ST. AGNES.

JOHN KEATS (1795-1821) once advised Shelley in writing poetry to "load every rift with ore." Into the matrix of an old superstition he has here poured gold abundantly ; he does not work in gilding or tinsel, but in the solid ore of sumptuous poetry. "I wish," he writes, "to diffuse the colouring of St. Agnes' eve through a poem in which Character and Sentiment would be the figures to such drapery." His ambition was to write "a few fine plays," but he died at 25. As a master of "colouring" in language he is unsurpassed by any writer of the English speech.

### II. MORTE D'ARTHUR.

ALFRED TENNYSON (1809-1892) included this poem in the famous volume published in 1842. He afterwards inserted it at the end of the series of Idylls written later, bearing on King Arthur and his knights. The basis of the poem is Sir Thomas Malory's prose romance, *Morte Darthur*, which Tennyson follows at times very closely. The old prose has a great charm of its own, and it is interesting to read the two versions together, and to consider where and how Tennyson has surpassed his original. His skilled artistry in words is very remarkable.

## III. SOHRAB AND RUSTUM.

MATTHEW ARNOLD (1822-1888) was a critic as well as a poet, and this poem is written in accordance with the theory that "the eternal objects of poetry are actions . . . excellent actions, which most powerfully appeal to the great primary human affections." The story comes from the Persian poet Firdausi, and its appeal to the great primary human affections has not suffered from Arnold's treatment. It is not, however, really characteristic of his work, for the troubles of the world and the difficulties of the human soul occupy most of his poetry ; but it is a typical product of the "culture" which he always preached.

## IV. ATALANTA'S RACE.

WILLIAM MORRIS (1834-1896), a man of many-sided and untiring energy, wrote *The Earthly Paradise*, from which *Atalanta's Race* is taken, on the principle quoted above from Arnold, but with far greater gusto and solider belief in what he was doing. His poetry, like all his activities, gives the impression of having been an unmixed joy to him. He thus found a refuge from the flatness of his times, for "the vituperation of a lifetime would scarcely exhaust the just abhorrence of the ugliness of the first twenty years of Victoria's reign." But in his later life he flung himself into the hottest of the fight for humanity.

## V. CONARY.

Thanks are due to Mr. H. S. H. Guinness for permission to print this splendid poem. It is interesting to contrast the Homeric effect artfully aimed at in *Sohrab and Rustum* with that attained in *Conary* by the simple force of noble narrative. Comparing Ferguson's treatment of old legend

with Tennyson's, we shall find the former more direct and severe, less self-conscious, melodious, but lacking Tennyson's marvellous felicity of phrase. His work has not remained entirely unrecognised. Swinburne wrote with enthusiasm of one of his ballads. Professor Dowden has described him as "an epic poet born out of due season," noting the union in his poetry of culture with simplicity and strength. Aubrey de Vere classed *Conary* as belonging to the "great" style of poetry. "It has caught thoroughly," he says, "that epic character so remarkable in those Bardic Legends which were transmitted orally through ages when Homer must have been a name unknown in Ireland."

Ferguson lived from 1810 to 1886, was an Ulster man, and first holder of the position of Deputy Keeper of the Public Records in Ireland.



## JOHN KEATS.

### THE EVE OF ST. AGNES.

#### I.

St. Agnes' Eve—Ah, bitter chill it was !  
The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold ;  
The hare limp'd trembling through the frozen grass,  
And silent was the flock in woolly fold :  
Numb were the Beadsman's fingers, while he told  
His rosary, and while his frosted breath,  
Like pious incense from a censer old,  
Seem'd taking flight for heaven, without a death,  
Past the sweet Virgin's picture, while his prayer he saith.

#### II.

His prayer he saith, this patient, holy man ;  
Then takes his lamp, and riseth from his knees,  
And back returneth, meagre, barefoot, wan,  
Along the chapel aisle by slow degrees :  
The sculptur'd dead, on each side, seem to freeze,  
Emprison'd in black, purgatorial rails :  
Knights, ladies, praying in dumb orat'ries,  
He passeth by ; and his weak spirit fails  
To think how they may ache in icy hoods and mails.

10

#### III.

Northward he turneth through a little door,  
And scarce three steps, ere Music's golden tongue  
Flatter'd to tears this aged man and poor ;  
But no—already had his deathbell rung :

20

The joys of all his life were said and sung :  
 His was harsh penance on St. Agnes' Eve :  
 Another way he went, and soon among  
 Rough ashes sat he for his soul's reprieve,  
 And all night kept awake, for sinners' sake to grieve.

## IV.

That ancient Beadsman heard the prelude soft ;  
 And so it chanc'd, for many a door was wide,  
 From hurry to and fro. Soon, up aloft, 30  
 The silver, snarling trumpets 'gan to chide :  
 The level chambers, ready with their pride,  
 Were glowing to receive a thousand guests :  
 The carved angels, ever eager-ey'd,  
 Star'd, where upon their heads the cornice rests,  
 With hair blown back, and wings put cross-wise on their  
 breasts.

## V.

At length burst in the argent revelry,  
 With plume, tiara, and all rich array,  
 Numerous as shadows haunting faerily  
 The brain, new stuff'd, in youth, with triumphs gay 40  
 Of old romance. These let us wish away,  
 And turn, sole-thoughted, to one Lady there,  
 Whose heart had brooded, all that wintry day,  
 On love, and wing'd St. Agnes' saintly care,  
 As she had heard old dames full many times declare.

## VI.

They told her how, upon St. Agnes' Eve,  
 Young virgins might have visions of delight,  
 And soft adorings from their loves receive,  
 Upon the honey'd middle of the night,  
 If ceremonies due they did aright ; 50  
 As supperless to bed they must retire,

And couch supine their beauties, lily white ;  
 Nor look behind, nor sideways, but require  
 Of Heaven with upward eyes for all that they desire.

## VII.

Full of this whim was thoughtful Madeline :  
 The music, yearning like a God in pain,  
 She scarcely heard : her maiden eyes divine,  
 Fix'd on the floor, saw many a sweeping train  
 Pass by—she heeded not at all : in vain  
 Came many a tiptoe, amorous cavalier,  
 And back retir'd ; not cool'd by high disdain,  
 But she saw not : her heart was elsewhere :  
 She sigh'd for Agnes' dreams, the sweetest of the year.

60

## VIII.

She danc'd along with vague, regardless eyes,  
 Anxious her lips, her breathing quick and short :  
 The hallow'd hour was near at hand : she sighs  
 Amid the timbrels, and the throng'd resort  
 Of whisperers in anger, or in sport ;  
 'Mid looks of love, defiance, hate, and scorn,  
 Hoodwink'd with faery fancy ; all amort,  
 Save to St. Agnes and her lambs unshorn,  
 And all the bliss to be before to-morrow morn.

70

## IX.

So, purposing each moment to retire,  
 She linger'd still. Meantime, across the moors,  
 Had come young Porphyro, with heart on fire  
 For Madeline. Beside the portal doors,  
 Buttress'd from moonlight, stands he, and implores  
 All saints to give him sight of Madeline,  
 But for one moment in the tedious hours,  
 That he might gaze and worship all unseen ;  
 Perchance speak, kneel, touch, kiss—in sooth such things  
 have been.

80

## X.

He ventures in : let no buzz'd whisper tell :  
 All eyes be muffled, or a hundred swords  
 Will storm his heart, Love's fev'rous citadel :  
 For him, those chambers held barbarian hordes,  
 Hyena foemen, and hot-blooded lords,  
 Whose very dogs would execrations howl  
 Against his lineage : not one breast affords  
 Him any mercy, in that mansion foul,  
 Save one old beldame, weak in body and in soul.

90

## XI.

Ah, happy chance ! the aged creature came,  
 Shuffling along with ivory-headed wand,  
 To where he stood, hid from the torch's flame,  
 Behind a broad hall-pillar, far beyond  
 The sound of merriment and chorus bland :  
 He startled her ; but soon she knew his face,  
 And grasped his fingers in her palsied hand,  
 Saying, " Mercy, Porphyro ! hie thee from this place ;  
 "They are all here to-night, the whole blood-thirsty race !

## XII.

"Get hence ! get hence ! there's dwarfish Hildebrand ; 100  
 "He had a fever late, and in the fit  
 "He cursed thee and thine, both house and land :  
 "Then there's that old Lord Maurice, not a whit  
 "More tame for his gray hairs—Alas me ! fit !  
 "Flit like a ghost away."—"Ah, Gossip dear,  
 "We're safe enough ; here in this arm-chair sit,  
 "And tell me how"—"Good Saints ! not here, not here ;  
 "Follow me, child, or else these stones will be thy bier."

## XIII.

He follow'd through a lowly arched way,  
 Brushing the cobwebs with his lofty plume,  
 And as she mutter'd " Well-a—well-a-day ! "

110

He found him in a little moonlight room,  
 Pale, lattic'd, chill, and silent as a tomb.  
 "Now tell me where is Madeline," said he,  
 "O tell me, Angela, by the holy loom  
 "Which none but secret sisterhood may see,  
 "When they St. Agnes' wool are weaving piously."

## XIV.

"St. Agnes ! Ah ! it is St. Agnes' Eve—  
 "Yet men will murder upon holy days :  
 "Thou must hold water in a witch's sieve, 120  
 "And be liege-lord of all the Elves and Fays,  
 "To venture so : it fills me with amaze  
 "To see thee, Porphyro !—St. Agnes' Eve !  
 "God's help ! my lady fair the conjuror plays  
 "This very night : good angels her deceive !  
 "But let me laugh awhile, I've mickle time to grieve."

## XV.

Feebly she laugheth in the languid moon,  
 While Porphyro upon her face doth look,  
 Like puzzled urchin on an aged crone  
 Who keepeth clos'd a wond'rous riddle-book, 130  
 As spectacled she sits in chimney nook.  
 But soon his eyes grew brilliant, when she told  
 His lady's purpose ; and he scarce could brook  
 Tears, at the thought of those enchantments cold,  
 And Madeline asleep in lap of legends old.

## XVI.

Sudden a thought came like a full-blown rose,  
 Flushing his brow, and in his pained heart  
 Made purple riot : then doth he propose  
 A stratagem, that makes the beldame start :  
 "A cruel man and impious thou art : 140

“Sweet lady, let her pray, and sleep, and dream  
“Alone with her good angels, far apart  
“From wicked men like thee. Go, go!—I deem  
“Thou canst not surely be the same that thou didst seem.”

XVII.

XVIII.

“ Ah ! why wilt thou affright a feeble soul ?  
“ A poor, weak, palsy-stricken, churchyard thing,  
“ Whose passing-bell may ere the midnight toll ;  
“ Whose prayers for thee, each morn and evening,  
“ Were never miss’d.”—Thus plaining, doth she bring  
A gentler speech from burning Porphyro ;  
So woful, and of such deep sorrowing,  
That Angela gives promise she will do  
Whatever he shall wish, betide her weal or woe. 160

XIX.

Which was, to lead him, in close secrecy,  
Even to Madeline's chamber, and there hide  
Him in a closet, of such privacy  
That he might see her beauty unespy'd,  
And win perhaps that night a peerless bride,  
While legion'd faeries pac'd the coverlet,  
And pale enchantment held her sleepy-ey'd.  
Never on such a night have lovers met,  
Since Merlin paid his Demon all the monstrous debt.

## XX.

“ It shall be as thou wishest,” said the Dame :  
 “ All cates and dainties shall be stored there  
 “ Quickly on this feast-night : by the tambour frame  
 “ Her own lute thou wilt see : no time to spare,  
 “ For I am slow and feeble, and scarce dare  
 “ On such a catering trust my dizzy head.  
 “ Wait here, my child, with patience ; kneel in prayer  
 “ The while : Ah ! thou must needs the lady wed,  
 “ Or may I never leave my grave among the dead.” . 180

## XXI.

So saying, she hobbled off with busy fear.  
 The lover’s endless minutes slowly pass’d ;  
 The dame return’d, and whisper’d in his ear  
 To follow her : with aged eyes aghast  
 From fright of dim espial. Safe at last,  
 Through many a dusky gallery, they gain  
 The maiden’s chamber, silken, hush’d, and chaste ;  
 Where Porphyro took covert, pleas’d amain.  
 His poor guide hurried back with agues in her brain.

## XXII.

Her faltering hand upon the balustrade,  
 Old Angela was feeling for the stair,  
 When Madeline, St. Agnes’ charmed maid,  
 Rose, like a mission’d spirit, unaware :  
 With silver taper’s light, and pious care,  
 She turn’d, and down the aged gossip led  
 To a safe level matting. Now prepare,  
 Young Porphyro, for gazing on that bed ;  
 She comes, she comes again, like ring-dove fray’d and fled.

## XXIII.

Out went the taper as she hurried in ;  
 Its little smoke, in pallid moonshine, died :  
 She clos’d the door, she panted, all akin  
 To spirits of the air, and visions wide :

No uttered syllable, or, woe betide !  
 But to her heart, her heart was voluble,  
 Paining with eloquence her balmy side ;  
 As though a tongueless nightingale should swell  
 Her throat in vain, and die, heart-stifled, in her dell.

## XXIV.

A casement high and triple-arch'd there was,  
 All garlanded with carven imag'ries  
 Of fruits, and flowers, and bunches of knot-grass, 210  
 And diamonded with panes of quaint device,  
 Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,  
 As are the tiger-moth's deep-damask'd wings ;  
 And in the midst, 'mong thousand heraldries,  
 And twilight saints, and dim emblazonings,  
 A shielded scutcheon blush'd with blood of queens and kings.

## XXV.

Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,  
 And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast,  
 As down she knelt for heaven's grace and boon ;  
 Rose-bloom fell on her hands, together prest, 220  
 And on her silver cross soft amethyst,  
 And on her hair a glory, like a saint :  
 She seem'd a splendid angel, newly drest,  
 Save wings, for heaven :—Porphyro grew faint ;  
 She knelt, so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint.

## XXVI.

Anon his heart revives : her vespers done,  
 Of all its wreathed pearls her hair she frees ;  
 Unclasps her warmed jewels one by one ;  
 Loosens her fragrant boddice ; by degrees  
 Her rich attire creeps rustling to her knees : 230  
 Half-hidden, like a mermaid in sea-weed,  
 Pensive awhile she dreams awake, and sees,  
 In fancy, fair St. Agnes in her bed,  
 But dares not look behind, or all the charm is fled.

## XXVII.

Soon, trembling in her soft and chilly nest,  
 In sort of wakeful swoon, perplex'd she lay,  
 Until the poppied warnith of sleep oppress'd  
 Her soothed limbs, and soul fatigued away ;  
 Flown, like a thought, until the morrow-day ;  
 Blissfully haven'd both from joy and pain ;      240  
 Clasp'd like a missal where swart Paynims pray ;  
 Blinded alike from sunshine and from rain,  
 As though a rose should shut, and be a bud again.

## XXVIII.

Stol'n to this paradise, and so entranced,  
 Porphyro gaz'd upon her empty dress,  
 And listen'd to her breathing, if it chanced  
 To wake into a slumberous tenderness ;  
 Which when he heard, that minute did he bless,  
 And breath'd himself : then from the closet crept,  
 Noiseless as fear in a wide wilderness,      250  
 And over the hush'd carpet, silent, stept,  
 And 'tween the curtains peep'd, where, lo !—how fast she  
 slept.

## XXIX.

Then by the bed-side, where the faded moon  
 Made a dim, silver twilight, soft he set  
 A table, and, half anguish'd threw thereon  
 A cloth of woven crimson, gold, and jet :—  
 O for some drowsy Morphean amulet !  
 The boisterous, midnight, festive clarion,  
 The kettle-drum, and far-heard clarinet,  
 Affray his ears, though but in dying tone :—      260  
 The hall door shuts again, and all the noise is gone.

## XXX.

And still she slept an azure-lidded sleep,  
 In blanched linen, smooth, and lavender'd,

While he from forth the closet brought a heap  
 Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd ;  
 With jellies soother than the creamy curd,  
 And lucent syrups, tinct with cinnamon ;  
 Manna and dates, in argosy transferr'd  
 From Fez ; and spiced dainties, every one,  
 From silken Samarcand to cedar'd Lebanon.

270

## XXXI.

These delicates he heap'd with glowing hand  
 On golden dishes and in baskets bright  
 Of wreathed silver : sumptuous they stand  
 In the retired quiet of the night,  
 Filling the chilly room with perfume light.—  
 “ And now, my love, my seraph fair, awake !  
 “ Thou art my heaven, and I thine eremite :  
 “ Open thine eyes, for meek St. Agnes' sake,  
 “ Or I shall drowse beside thee, so my soul doth ache.”

## XXXII.

Thus whispering, his warm, unnerved arm  
 Sank in her pillow. Shaded was her dream  
 By the dusk curtains :—’twas a midnight charm  
 Impossible to melt as iced stream ;  
 The lustrous salvers in the moonlight gleam ;  
 Broad golden fringe upon the carpet lies :  
 It seem'd he never, never could redeem  
 From such a stedfast spell his lady's eyes ;  
 So mus'd awhile, entoil'd in woofed phantasies.

280

## XXXIII.

Awakening up, he took her hollow lute,—  
 Tumultucus,—and, in chords that tenderest be,  
 He play'd an ancient ditty, long since mute,  
 In Provence call'd, “ *La belle dame sans mercy* :”  
 Close to her ear touching the melody ;—  
 Wherewith disturb'd, she utter'd a soft moan :  
 He ceas'd—she panted quick—and suddenly

290

Her blue affrayed eyes wide open shone :  
Upon his knees he sank, pale as smooth-sculptured stone.

## XXXIV.

Her eyes were open, but she still beheld,  
Now wide awake, the vision of her sleep :  
There was a painful change, that nigh expell'd      300  
The blisses of her dream so pure and deep  
At which fair Madeline began to weep,  
And moan forth witless words with many a sigh ;  
While still her gaze on Porphyro would keep ;  
Who knelt, with joined hands and piteous eye,  
Fearing to move or speak, she look'd so dreamingly.

## XXXV.

“Ah, Porphyro !” said she, “but even now  
“Thy voice was at sweet tremble in mine ear,  
“Made tuneable with every sweetest vow ;  
“And those sad eyes were spiritual and clear :      310  
“How chang'd thou art ! how pallid, chill, and drear !  
“Give me that voice again, my Porphyro,  
“Those looks immortal, those complainings dear !  
“O leave me not in this eternal woe,  
For if thou diest, my Love, I know not where to go.”

## XXXVI.

Beyond a mortal man impassion'd far  
At these voluptuous accents, he arose,  
Ethereal, flush'd, and like a throbbing star  
Seen mid the sapphire heaven's deep repose ;  
Into her dream he melted, as the rose      320  
Blendeth its odour with the violet,—  
Solution sweet : meantime the frost-wind blows  
Like Love's alarum patterning the sharp sleet  
Against the window panes ; St. Agnes' moon hath set.

## XXXVII.

‘Tis dark : quick pattereth the flaw-blown sleet ;  
“This is no dream, my bride, my Madeline !”

"Tis dark : the iced gusts still rave and beat :  
"No dream, alas ! alas ! and woe is mine !  
"Porphyro will leave me here to fade and pine.—  
"Cruel ! what traitor could thee hither bring ?  
"I curse not, for my heart is lost in thine,  
"Though thou forsakest a deceived thing ;—  
"A dove forlorn and lost with sick unpruned wing."

XXXVIII.

“ My Madeline ! sweet dreamer ! lovely bride !  
“ Say, may I be for aye thy vassal blest ?  
“ Thy beauty’s shield, heart-shap’d and vermeil dy’d  
“ Ah, silver shrine, here will I take my rest  
“ After so many hours of toil and quest.  
“ A famish’d pilgrim,—sav’d by miracle.  
“ Though I have found, I will not rob thy nest  
“ Saving of thy sweet self ; if thou think’st well  
“ To trust, fair Madeline, to no rude infidel.

XXXIX.

“Hark! 'tis an elfin-storm from faery land,  
“Of haggard seeming, but a boon indeed:  
“Arise—arise! the morning is at hand;—  
“The bloated wassaillers will never heed:  
“Let us away, my love, with happy speed;  
“There are no ears to hear, or eyes to see,—  
“Drown'd all in Rhenish and the sleepy mead:  
“Awake! arise! my love, and fearless be,  
“For o'er the southern moors I have a home for thee.”

XL

She hurried at his words, beset with fears,  
For there were sleeping dragons all around,  
At glaring watch, perhaps, with ready spears—  
Down the wide stairs a darkling way they found.—  
In all the house was heard no human sound.  
A chain-droop'd lamp was flickering by each door ;  
The arras, rich with horseman, hawk, and hound,

Flutter'd in the besieging wind's uproar ;  
And the long carpets rose along the gusty floor.

360

## XLI.

They glide, like phantoms, into the wide hall ;  
Like phantoms to the iron perch they glide ;  
Where lay the Porter, in uneasy sprawl,  
With a huge empty flagon by his side :  
The wakeful bloodhound rose, and shook his hide,  
But his sagacious eye an inmate owns :  
By one, and one, the bolts full easy slide :—  
The chains lie silent on the footworn stones ;—  
The key turns, and the door upon its hinges groans.

## XLII.

And they are gone : aye, ages long ago  
These lovers fled away into the storm.  
That night the Baron dreamt of many a woe,  
And all his warrior-guests, with shade and form  
Of witch, and demon, and large coffin-worm,  
Were long be-nightmar'd. Angela the old  
Died palsy-twitch'd, with meagre face deform ;  
The Beadsman, after thousand aves told,  
For aye unsought for slept among his ashes cold.

370

## ALFRED LORD TENNYSON.

### MORTE D'ARTHUR.

So all day long the noise of battle roll'd  
Among the mountains by the winter sea ;  
Until King Arthur's table, man by man,  
Had fallen in Lyonesse about their Lord,  
King Arthur : then, because his wound was deep,  
The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,  
Sir Bedivere, the last of all his knights,  
And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,  
A broken chancel with a broken cross,  
That stood on a dark strait of barren land. 10  
On one side lay the Ocean, and on one  
Lay a great water, and the moon was full.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere :  
"The sequel of to-day unsolders all  
The goodliest fellowship of famous knights  
Whereof this world holds record. Such a sleep  
They sleep—the men I loved. I think that we  
Shall never more, at any future time,  
Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds,  
Walking about the gardens and the halls 20  
Of Camelot, as in the days that were.  
I perish by this people which I made,—  
Tho' Merlin sware that I should come again  
To rule once more—but let what will be, be,  
I am so deeply smitten thro' the helm  
That without help I cannot last till morn.

Thou therefore take my brand Excalibur,  
 Which was my pride : for thou rememberest how  
 In those old days, one summer noon, an arm  
 Rose up from out the bosom of the lake,      30  
 Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,  
 Holding the sword—and how I rowed across  
 And took it, and have worn it, like a king :  
 And, wheresoever I am sung or told  
 In aftertime, this also shall be known :  
 But now delay not : take Excalibur,  
 And fling him far into the middle mere :  
 Watch what thou seëst, and lightly bring me word."

To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere :  
 "It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus,      40  
 Aidless, alone, and smitten thro' the helm.  
 A little thing may harm a wounded man.  
 Yet I thy hest will all perform at full,  
 Watch what I see, and lightly bring thee word."

So saying, from the ruin'd shrine he stept  
 And in the moon athwart the piace of tombs,  
 Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men,  
 Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang  
 Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping down  
 By zig-zag paths, and juts of pointed rock,      50  
 Came on the shining levels of the lake.

There drew he forth the brand Excalibur,  
 And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,  
 Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth  
 And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt :  
 For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks  
 Myriads of topaz-lights and jacinth-work  
 Of subtlest jewellery. He gazed so long  
 That both his eyes were dazzled as he stood,  
 This way and that dividing the swift mind,      60  
 In act to throw : but at the last it seem'd  
 Better to leave Excalibur concealed

There in the many-knotted waterflags  
That whistled stiff and dry about the marge.  
So strode he back slow to the wounded King.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere :  
"Hast thou perform'd my mission which I gave ?  
What is it thou hast seen ? or what hast heard ?"

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere :  
"I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,  
And the wild water lapping on the crag." 70

To whom replied King Arthur, faint and pale :  
"Thou hast betray'd thy nature and thy name,  
Not rendering true answer, as beseem'd  
Thy fæalty, nor like a noble knight :  
For surer sign had follow'd, either hand,  
Or voice, or else a motion of the mere.  
This is a shameful thing for men to lie.  
Yet now, I charge thee, quickly go again  
As thou art lief and dear, and do the thing  
I bid thee, watch, and lightly bring me word." 80

Then went Sir Bedivere the second time  
Across the ridge, and paced beside the mere,  
Counting the dewy pebbles, fix'd in thought ;  
But when he saw the wonder of the hilt,  
How curiously and strangely chased, he smote  
His palms together, and he cried aloud,

"And if indeed I cast the brand away,  
Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,  
Should thus be lost for ever from the earth,  
Which might have pleased the eyes of many men.  
What good should follow this, if this were done ?  
What harm, undone ? deep harm to disobey,  
Seeing obedience is the bond of rule.  
Were it well to obey then, if a king demand  
An act unprofitable, against himself ?  
The King is sick, and knows not what he does.  
What record, or what relic of my lord

Should be to aftertime, but empty breath  
 And rumours of a doubt ? but were this kept, 100  
 Storēd in some treasure-house of mighty kings,  
 Some one might show it at a joust of arms,  
 Saying, ' King Arthur's sword, Excalibur,  
 Wrought by the lonely maiden of the Lake.  
 Nine years she wrought it, sitting in the deeps  
 Upon the hidden bases of the hills.'  
 So might some old man speak in the aftertime  
 To all the people, winning reverence.  
 But now much honour and much fame were lost."

So spake he, clouded with his own conceit, 110  
 And hid Excalibur the second time,  
 And so strode back slow to the wounded King.

Then spoke King Arthur, breathing heavily :  
 " What is it thou hast seen ? or what hast heard ?"  
 And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere :  
 " I heard the water lapping on the crag,  
 And the long ripple washing in the reeds."

To whom replied King Arthur, much in wrath :  
 " Ah, miserable and unkind, untrue,  
 Unknightly, traitor-hearted ! Woe is me ! 120  
 Authority forgets a dying king,  
 Laid widow'd of the power in his eye  
 That bow'd the will. I see thee what thou art ;  
 For thou, the latest-left of all my knights,  
 In whom should meet the offices of all,  
 Thou wouldest betray me for the precious hilt ;  
 Either from lust of gold, or like a girl  
 Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes.  
 Yet, for a man may fail in duty twice,  
 And the third time may prosper, get thee hence : 130  
 But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur,  
 I will arise and slay thee with my hands."

Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,  
 And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged

Among the bulrush-beds, and clutch'd the sword,  
 And strongly wheel'd and threw it. The great brand  
 Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon,  
 And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch,  
 Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,  
 Seen where the moving isles of winter shock      140  
 By night, with noises of the nortnern sea.  
 So flash'd and fell the brand Excalibur :  
 But ere he dipt the surface, rose an arm  
 Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,  
 And caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him  
 Three times, and drew him under'in the mere.  
 And lightly went the other to the King.

Then spoke King Arthur, drawing thicker breath :  
 "Now see I by thine eyes that this is done.  
 Speak out : what is it thou hast heard, or seen ?"      150

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere :  
 "Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the gems  
 Should blind my purpose, for I never saw,  
 Nor shall see, here or elsewhere, till I die,  
 Not tho' I live three lives of mortal men,  
 So great a miracle as yonder hilt.  
 Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him ;  
 But when I look'd again, behold an arm,  
 Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,  
 That caught him by the hilt and brandish'd him      160  
 Three times, and drew him under in the mere."

And answer made King Arthur, breathing hard ;  
 "My end draws nigh ; 'tis time that I were gone.  
 Make broad thy shoulders to receive my weight,  
 And bear me to the margin ; yet I fear  
 My wound hath taken cold, and I shall die."

So saying, from the pavement he half rose,  
 Slowly, with pain, reclining on his arm,  
 And looking wistfully with wide blue eyes  
 As in a picture. Him Sir Bedivere      170

Remorsefully regarded thro' his tears,  
 And would have spoken, but he found not words,  
 Then took with care, and kneeling on one knee,  
 O'er both his shoulders drew the languid hands,  
 And rising bore him thro' the place of tombs.

' But, as he walk'd, King Arthur panted hard,  
 Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed  
 When all the house is mute. So sigh'd the King,  
 Muttering and murmuring at his ear, "Quick, quick !  
 I fear it is too late, and I shall die." 180

But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,  
 Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walk'd,  
 Larger than human on the frozen hills.

He heard the deep behind him, and a cry  
 Before. His own thought drove him, like a goad.  
 Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves  
 And barren chasms, and all to left and right  
 The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based  
 His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang  
 Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels— 190

And on a sudden, lo ! the level lake  
 And the long glories of the winter moon.

Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,  
 Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,  
 Beneath them ; and descending they were ware  
 That all the decks were dense with stately forms  
 Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream—by these  
 Three Queens with crowns of gold—and from them rose  
 A cry that shiver'd to the tingling stars,  
 And, as it were one voice an agony 200  
 Of lamentation, like a wind, that shrills  
 All night in a waste land, where no one comes,  
 Or hath come, since the making of the world.

Then murmur'd Arthur, "Place me in the barge,"  
 And to the barge they came. There those three Queens  
 Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept.

But she, that rose the tallest of them all  
 And fairest, laid his head upon her lap,  
 And loosed the shatter'd casque, and chafed his hands,  
 And call'd him by his name, complaining loud,      210  
 And dropping bitter tears against his brow  
 Striped with dark blood : for all his face was white  
 And colourless, and like the wither'd moon  
 Smote by the fresh beam of the springing east ;  
 And all his greaves and cuisses dash'd with drops  
 Of onset ; and the light and lustrous curls—  
 That made his forehead like a rising sun  
 High from the dais-throne—were parch'd with dust ;  
 Or, clotted into points and hanging loose,  
 Mix'd with the knightly growth that fringed his lips.  
 So like a shatter'd column lay the King ;      221  
 Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest,  
 From spur to plume a star of tournament,  
 Shot thro' the lists at Camelot, and charged  
 Before the eyes of ladies and of kings.

Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere,  
 "Ah ! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go ?  
 Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes ?  
 For now I see the true old times are dead,  
 When every morning brought a noble chance,      230  
 And every chance brought out a noble knight.  
 Such times have been not since the light that led  
 The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.  
 But now the whole ROUND TABLE is dissolved  
 Which was an image of the mighty world ;  
 And I, the last, go forth, companionless,  
 And the days darken round me, and the years,  
 Among new men, strange faces, other minds."

And slowly answered Arthur from the barge :  
 "The old order changeth, yielding place to new,  
 And God fulfils Himself in many ways,      240  
 Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.

Comfort thyself : what comfort is in me ?  
 I have lived my life, and that which I have done  
 May He within Himself make pure ! but thou,  
 If thou shouldst never see my face again,  
 Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer  
 Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice  
 Rise like a fountain for me night and day.  
 For what are men better than sheep or goats                   250  
 That nourish a blind life within the brain,  
 If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer  
 Both for themselves and those who call them friend ?  
 For so the whole round earth is every way  
 Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.  
 But now farewell. I am going a long way  
 With these thou seëst—if indeed I go—  
 (For all my mind is clouded with a doubt)  
 To the island-valley of Avilion ;  
 Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,                   260  
 Nor ever wind blows loudly ; but it lies  
 Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard lawns  
 And bowery hollows crowned with summer sea,  
 Where I will heal me of my grievous wound."

So said he, and the barge with oar and sail  
 Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan  
 That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,  
 Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood  
 With swarthy webs. Long stood Sir Bedivere  
 Revolving many memories, till the hull                   270  
 Look'd one black dot against the verge of dawn,  
 And on the mere the wailing died away.

## MATTHEW ARNOLD.

### SOHRAB AND RUSTUM.

#### AN EPISODE.

AND the first grey of morning fill'd the east,  
And the fog rose out of the Oxus stream.  
But all the Tartar camp along the stream  
Was hush'd, and still the men were plunged in sleep ;  
Sohrab alone, he slept not ; all night long  
He had lain wakeful, tossing on his bed ;  
But when the grey dawn stole into his tent,  
He rose, and clad himself, and girt his sword,  
And took his horseman's cloak, and left his tent,  
And went abroad into the cold wet fog,                           10  
Through the dim camp to Peran-Wisa's tent.  
Through the black Tartar tents he pass'd, which stood  
Clustering like beehives on the low flat strand  
Of Oxus, where the summer floods o'erflow  
When the sun melts the snows in high Pamire ;  
Through the black tents he pass'd, o'er that low strand,  
And to a hillock came, a little back  
From the stream's brink—the spot where first a boat,  
Crossing the stream in summer, scrapes the land.  
The men of former times had crown'd the top                           20  
With a clay fort ; but that was fall'n, and now  
The Tartars built there Peran-Wisa's tent,  
A dome of laths, and o'er it felts were spread.  
And Sohrab came there, and went in, and stood  
Upon the thick-piled carpets in the tent,

And found the old man sleeping on his bed  
 Of rags and felts, and near him lay his arms.  
 And Peran-Wisa heard him, though the step  
 Was dull'd ; for he slept light, an old man's sleep ;  
 And he rose quickly on one arm, and said :—

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“ Who art thou ? for it is not yet clear dawn.  
 Speak ! is there news, or any night alarm ? ”

But Sohrab came to the bedside and said :—  
 “ Thou know'st me, Peran-Wisa ! it is I.  
 The sun is not yet risen, and the foe  
 Sleep ; but I sleep not ; all night long I lie  
 Tossing and wakeful, and I come to thee.  
 For so did King Afrasiab bid me seek  
 Thy counsel, and to heed thee as thy son,  
 In Samarcand, before the army march'd ;  
 And I will tell thee what my heart desires.  
 Thou know'st if, since from Ader-baijan first  
 I came among the Tartars and bore arms,  
 I have still served Afrasiab well, and shown,  
 At my boy's years, the courage of a man.

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This too thou know'st, that while I still bear on  
 The conquering Tartar ensigns through the world,  
 And beat the Persians back on every field,  
 I seek one man, one man, and one alone—

Rustum, my father ; who I hoped should greet,  
 Should one day greet, upon some well-fought field,  
 His not unworthy, not inglorious son.

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So I long hoped, but him I never find.  
 Come then, hear now, and grant me what I ask.

Let the two armies rest to-day ; but I  
 Will challenge forth the bravest Persian lords  
 To meet me, man to man ; if I prevail,  
 Rustum will surely hear it ; if I fall—  
 Old man, the dead need no one, claim no kin.

Dim is the rumour of a common fight,  
 Where host meets host, and many names are sunk ;

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But of a single combat fame speaks clear."

He spoke ; and Peran-Wisa took the hand  
Of the young man in his, and sigh'd, and said :—

"O Sohrab, an unquiet heart is thine !  
Canst thou not rest among the Tartar chiefs,  
And share the battle's common chance with us  
Who love thee, but must press for ever first,  
In single fight incurring single risk,  
To find a father thou hast never seen ?  
That were far best, my son, to stay with us  
Unmurmuring ; in our tents, while it is war,  
And when 'tis truce, then in Afrasiab's towns.  
But, if this one desire indeed rules all,  
To seek out Rustum—seek him not through fight !  
Seek him in peace, and carry to his arms,  
O Sohrab, carry an unwounded son !  
But far hence seek him, for he is not here.  
For now it is not as when I was young,  
When Rustum was in front of every fray ;  
But now he keeps apart, and sits at home,  
In Seistan, with Zal, his father old.  
Whether that his own mighty strength at last  
Feels the abhorr'd approaches of old age,  
Or in some quarrel with the Persian King.  
There go !—Thou wilt not ? Yet my heart forebodes  
Danger or death awaits thee on this field.  
Fain would I know thee safe and well, though lost  
To us ; fain therefore send thee hence, in peace  
To seek thy father, not seek single fights  
In vain ;—but who can keep the lion's cub  
From ravening, and who govern Rustum's son ?  
Go, I will grant thee what thy heart desires."

So said he, and dropp'd Sohrab's hand, and left  
His bed, and the warm rugs whereon he lay ;  
And o'er his chilly limbs his woollen coat  
He pass'd, and tied his sandals on his feet,

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And threw a white cloak round him, and he took  
 In his right hand a ruler's staff, no sword ;  
 And on his head he set his sheep-skin cap,  
 Black, glossy, curl'd, the fleece of Kara-Kul ;  
 And raised the curtain of his tent, and call'd  
 His herald to his side, and went abroad.

The sun by this had risen, and clear'd the fog  
 From the broad Oxus and the glittering sands.  
 And from their tents the Tartar horsemen filed  
 Into the open plain ; so Haman bade—  
 Haman, who next to Peran-Wisa ruled  
 The host, and still was in his lusty prime.  
 From their black tents, long files of horse, they stream'd ;  
 As when some grey November morn the files,  
 In marching order spread, of long-neck'd cranes  
 Stream over Casbin and the southern slopes  
 Of Elburz, from the Aralian estuaries,  
 Or some frore Caspian reed-bed, southward bound .  
 For the warm Persian sea-board—so they stream'd.  
 The Tartars of the Oxus, the King's guard,  
 First, with black sheep-skin caps and with long spears ;  
 Large men, large steeds ; who from Bokhara come  
 And Khiva, and ferment the milk of mares. 120  
 Next, the more temperate Toorkmuns of the south,  
 The Tukas, and the lances of Salore,  
 And those from Attruck and the Caspian sands ;  
 Light men and on light steeds, who only drink  
 The acrid milk of camels, and their wells.  
 And then a swarm of wandering horse, who came  
 From far, and a more doubtful service own'd ;  
 The Tartars of Ferghana, from the banks  
 Of the Jaxartes, men with scanty beards  
 And close-set skull-caps ; and those wilder hordes 130  
 Who roam o'er Kipchak and the northern waste,  
 Kalmuks and unkept Kuzzaks, tribes who stray  
 Nearest the Pole, and wandering Kirghizzes,

Who come on shaggy ponies from Pamere ;  
 These all filed out from camp into the plain.  
 And on the other side the Persians form'd ;—  
 First a light cloud of horse, Tartars they seem'd,  
 The Ilyats of Khorassan ; and behind,  
 The royal troops of Persia, horse and foot,  
 Marshall'd battalions bright in burnish'd steel.      140  
 But Peran-Wisa with his herald came,  
 Threading the Tartar squadrons to the front,  
 And with his staff kept back the foremost ranks.  
 And when Ferood, who led the Persians, saw  
 That Peran-Wisa kept the Tartars back,  
 He took his spear, and to the front he came,  
 And check'd his ranks, and fix'd them where they stood.  
 And the old Tartar came upon the sand  
 Betwixt the silent hosts, and spake, and said :—  
     “ Ferood, and ye, Persians and Tartars, hear !      150  
 Let there be truce between the hosts to-day.  
 But choose a champion from the Persian lords  
 To fight our champion Sohrab, man to man.”

As, in the country, on a morn in June,  
 When the dew glistens on the pearled ears,  
 A shiver runs through the deep corn for joy—  
 So, when they heard what Peran-Wisa said,  
 A thrill through all the Tartar squadrons ran  
 Of pride and hope for Sohrab, whom they loved.

But as a troop of pedlars, from Cabool,      160  
 Cross underneath the Indian Caucasus,  
 That vast sky-neighbouring mountain of milk snow ;  
 Crossing so high, that, as they mount, they pass  
 Long flocks of travelling birds dead on the snow,  
 Choked by the air, and scarce can they themselves  
 Slake their parch'd throats with sugar'd mulberries—  
 In single file they move, and stop their breath,  
 For fear they should dislodge the o'erhanging snows—  
 So the pale Persians held their breath with fear.

And to Ferood his brother chiefs came up 170  
 To "ounsel ; Gudurz and Zoarrah came,  
 And Feraburz, who ruled the Persian host  
 Second, and was the uncle of the King ;  
 These came and counsell'd, and then Gudurz said :—

“ Ferood, shame bids us take their challenge up,  
 Yet champion have we none to match this youth.  
 He has the wild stag's foot, the lion's heart.  
 But Rustum came last night ; aloof he sits  
 And sullen, and has pitch'd his tents apart.  
 Him will I seek, and carry to his ear 180  
 The Tartar challenge, and this young man's name.  
 Haply he will forget his wrath, and fight.  
 Stand forth the while, and take their challenge up.”

So spake he ; and Ferood stood forth and cried :—  
 “ Old man, be it agreed as thou hast said !  
 Let Sohrab arm, and we will find a man.”

He spake : and Peran-Wisa turn'd, and strode  
 Back through the opening squadrons to his tent.  
 But through the anxious Persians Gudurz ran,  
 And cross'd the camp which lay behind, and reach'd, 190  
 Out on the sands beyond it, Rustum's tents.  
 Of scarlet cloth they were, and glittering gay,  
 Just pitch'd ; the high pavilion in the midst  
 Was Rustum's, and his men lay camp'd around.  
 And Gudurz enter'd Rustum's tent, and found  
 Rustum : his morning meal was done, but still  
 The table stood before him, charged with food—  
 A side of roasted sheep, and cakes of bread,  
 And dark green melons ; and there Rustum sate  
 Listless, and held a falcon on his wrist, 200  
 And play'd with it ; but Gudurz came and stood  
 Before him ; and he look'd, and saw him stand,  
 And with a cry sprang up and dropp'd the bird,  
 And greeted Gudurz with both hands, and said :—  
 “ Welcome ! these eyes could see no better sight.”

What news? but sit down first, and eat and drink."

But Gudurz stood in the tent-door, and said: -

"Not now! a time will come to eat and drink,

But not to-day; to-day has other needs.

The armies are drawn out, and stand at gaze; 210

For from the Tartars is a challenge brought

To pick a champion from the Persian lords

To fight their champion—and thou know'st his name—

Sohrab men call him, but his birth is hid.

O Rustum, like thy might is this young man's!

He has the wild stag's foot, the lion's heart;

And he is young, and Iran's chiefs are old,

Or else too weak; and all eyes turn to thee.

Come down and help us, Rustum, or we lose."

He spoke; but Rustum answer'd with a smile:— 220

"Go to! if Iran's chiefs are old, then I

Am older; if the young are weak, the King

Errs strangely; for the King, for Kai Khosroo,

Himself is young, and honours younger men,

And lets the aged moulder to their graves.

Rustum he loves no more, but loves the young—

The young may rise at Sohrab's vaunts, not I.

For what care I, though all speak Sohrab's fame?

For would that I myself had such a son,

And not that one slight helpless girl I have— 230

A son so famed, so brave, to send to war,

And I to tarry with the snow-hair'd Zal,

My father, whom the robber Afghans vex,

And clip his borders short, and drive his herds,

And he has none to guard his weak old age.

There would I go, and hang my armour up,

And with my great name fence that weak old man,

And spend the goodly treasures I have got,

And rest my age, and hear of Sohrab's fame,

And leave to death the hosts of thankless kings, 240

And with these slaughterous hands draw sword no more."

He spoke, and smiled ; and Gudurz made reply :—  
 “What then, O Rustum, will men say to this,  
 When Sohrab dares our bravest forth, and seeks  
 Thee most of all, and thou, whom most he seeks,  
 Hidest thy face ? Take heed lest men should say :  
*Like some old miser, Rustum hoards his fame,*  
*And shuns to peril it with younger men.*”

And greatly moved, then Rustum made reply :—  
 “O Gudurz, wherefore dost thou say such words ?      250  
 Thou knowest better words than this to say.  
 What is one more, one less, obscure or famed,  
 Valiant or craven, young or old, to me ?  
 Are not they mortal, am not I myself ?  
 But who for men of nought would do great deeds ?  
 Come, thou shalt see how Rustum hoards his fame !  
 But I will fight unknown, and in plain arms ;  
 Let not men say of Rustum, he was match'd  
 In single fight with any mortal man.”

He spoke, and frown'd ; and Gudurz turn'd, and ran  
 Back quickly through the camp in fear and joy—      261  
 Fear at his wrath, but joy that Rustum came.  
 But Rustum strode to his tent-door, and call'd  
 His followers in, and bade them bring his arms,  
 And clad himself in steel ; the arms he chose  
 Were plain, and on his shield was no device,  
 Only his helm was rich, inlaid with gold,  
 And, from the fluted spine atop, a plume  
 Of horsehair waved, a scarlet horsehair plume.  
 So arm'd, he issued forth ; and Ruksh, his horse.      270  
 Follow'd him like a faithful hound at heel—  
 Ruksh, whose renown was noised through all the earth,  
 The horse, whom Rustum on a foray once  
 Did in Bokhara by the river find  
 A colt beneath its dam, and drove him home,  
 And rear'd him ; a bright bay, with lofty crest,  
 Dight with a saddle-cloth of broider'd green

Crusted with gold, and on the ground were work'd  
 All beasts of chase, all beasts which hunters know.  
 So follow'd, Rustum left his tents, and cross'd      280  
 The camp, and to the Persian host appear'd.  
 And all the Persians knew him, and with shouts  
 Hail'd ; but the Tartars knew not who he was.  
 And dear as the wet diver to the eyes  
 Of his pale wife who waits and weeps on shore,  
 By sandy Bahrein, in the Persian Gulf,  
 Plunging all day in the blue waves, at night,  
 Having made up his tale of precious pearls,  
 Rejoins her in the hut upon the sands—  
 So dear to the pale Persians Rustum came.      290

And Rustum to the Persian front advanced,  
 And Sohrab arm'd in Haman's tent, and came.  
 And as afield the reapers cut a swath  
 Down through the middle of a rich man's corn,  
 And on each side are squares of standing corn,  
 And in the midst a stubble, short and bare—  
 So on each side were squares of men, with spears  
 Bristling, and in the midst, the open sand.  
 And Rustum came upon the sand, and cast  
 His eyes toward the Tartar tents, and saw      300  
 Sohrab come forth, and eyed him as he came.

As some rich woman, on a winter's morn,  
 Eyes through her silken curtains the poor drudge .  
 Who with numb blacken'd fingers makes her fire—  
 At cock-crow, on a starlit winter's morn,  
 When the frost flowers the whiten'd window-panes—  
 And wonders how she lives, and what the thoughts  
 Of that poor drudge may be ; so Rustum eyed  
 The unknown adventurous youth, who from afar  
 Came seeking Rustum, and defying forth      310  
 All the most valiant chiefs ; long he perused  
 His spirited air, and wonder'd who he was.  
 For very young he seem'd, tenderly rear'd ;

Like some young cypress, tall, and dark, and straight,  
 Which in a queen's secluded garden throws  
 Its slight dark shadow on the moonlit turf,  
 By midnight, to a bubbling fountain's sound—  
 So slender Sohrab seem'd, so softly rear'd ;  
 'And a deep pity entered Rustum's soul  
 As he beheld him coming ; and he stood,      320  
 And beckon'd to him with his hand, and said :—

“O thou young man, the air of Heaven is soft,  
 And warm, and pleasant ; but the grave is cold !  
 Heaven's air is better than the cold dead grave.  
 Behold me ! I am vast, and clad in iron,  
 And tried ; and I have stood on many a field  
 Of blood, and I have fought with many a foe—  
 Never was that field lost, or that foe saved.  
 O Sohrab, wherefore wilt thou rush on death ?  
 Be govern'd ! quit the Tartar host, and come      330  
 To Iran, and be as my son to me,  
 And fight beneath my banner till I die !  
 There are no youths in Iran brave as thou.”

So he spake, mildly ; Sohrab heard his voice,  
 The mighty voice of Rustum, and he saw  
 His giant figure planted on the sand,  
 Sole, like some single tower, which a chief  
 Hath builded on the waste in former years  
 Against the robbers ; and he saw that head,  
 Streak'd with its first grey hairs ;—hope filled his soul,  
 And he ran forward and embraced his knees,      341  
 And clasp'd his hand within his own, and said :—

“O, by thy father's head ! by thine own soul !  
 Art thou not Rustum ? speak ! art thou not he ?”

But Rustum eyed askance the kneeling youth,  
 And turn'd away, and spake to his own soul :—

“Ah me, I muse what this young fox may mean !  
 False, wily, boastful are these Tartar boys.  
 For if I now confess this thing he asks,

And hide it not, but say : *Rustum is here !* 350

He will not yield indeed, nor quit our foes,  
But he will find some pretext not to fight,  
And praise my fame, and proffer courteous gifts,  
A belt or sword perhaps, and go his way.  
And on a feast-tide, in Afrasiab's hall,  
In Samarcand, he will arise and cry :  
'I challenged once, when the two armies camp'd  
Beside the Oxus, all the Persian lords  
To cope with me in single fight ; but they  
Shrank, only Rustum dared ; then he and I 360  
Changed gifts, and went on equal terms away.'  
So will he speak, perhaps, while men applaud ;  
Then were the chiefs of Iran shamed through me."

And then he turn'd, and sternly spake aloud :—  
"Rise ! wherefore dost thou vainly question thus  
Of Rustum ? I am here, whom thou hast call'd  
By challenge forth ; make good thy vaunt, or yield !  
Is it with Rustum only thou wouldest fight ?  
Rash boy, men look on Rustum's face and flee !  
For well I know, that did great Rustum stand 370  
Before thy face this day, and were reveal'd,  
There would be then no talk of fighting more.  
But being what I am, I tell thee this.—  
Do thou record it in thine inmost soul :  
Either thou shalt renounce thy vaunt and yield,  
Or else thy bones shall strew this sand, till winds  
Bleach them, or Oxus with his summer-floods,  
Oxus in sunnier wash them all away."

He spoke ; and Sohrab answer'd, on his feet :—  
"Art thou so fierce ? Thou wilt not fright me so ! 380  
I am no girl, to be made pale by words.  
Yet this thou hast said well, did Rustum stand  
Here on this field, there were no fighting then.  
But Rustum is far hence, and we stand here.  
Begin ! thou art more vast, more dread than I,

And thou art proved, I know, and I am young—  
 But yet success sways with the breath of Heaven.  
 And though thou thinkest that thou knowest sure  
 Thy victory, yet thou canst not surely know.  
 For we are all, like swimmers in the sea, 390  
 Poised on the top of a huge wave of fate,  
 Which hangs uncertain to which side to fall.  
 And whether it will heave us up to land,  
 Or whether it will roll us out to sea,  
 Back out to sea, to the deep waves of death,  
 We know not, and no search will make us know ;  
 Only the event will teach us in its hour.”

He spoke, and Rustum answer'd not, but hurl'd  
 His spear ; down from the shoulder, down it came,  
 As on some partridge in the corn a hawk, 400  
 That long has tower'd in the airy clouds,  
 Drops like a plummets : Sohrab saw it come,  
 And sprang aside, quick as a flash ; the spear  
 Hiss'd, and went quivering down into the sand,  
 Which it sent flying wide ;—then Sohrab threw  
 In turn, and full struck Rustum's shield ; sharp rang,  
 The iron plates rang sharp, but turn'd the spear  
 And Rustum seized his club, which none but he  
 Could wield ; an unlopp'd trunk it was, and huge,  
 Still rough—like those which men in treeless plains 410  
 To build them boats fish from the flooded rivers,  
 Hyphasis or Hydaspes, when, high up  
 By their dark springs, the wind in winter-time  
 Hath made in Himalayan forests wrack,  
 And strewn the channels with torn boughs—so huge  
 The club which Rustum lifted now, and struck  
 One stroke ; but again Sohrab sprang aside,  
 Lithe as the glancing snake, and the club came  
 Thundering to earth, and leapt from Rustum's hand.  
 And Rustum follow'd his own blow, and fell 420  
 To his knees, and with his fingers clutch'd the sand ;

And now might Sohrab have unsheathed his sword,  
 And pierced the mighty Rustum while he lay  
 Dizzy, and on his knees, and choked with sand ;  
 But he look'd on, and smiled, nor bared his sword.  
 But courteously drew back, and spoke, and said :—

“Thou strik'st too hard ! that club of thine will float  
 Upon the summer floods, and not my bones.  
 But rise, and be not wroth ! not wroth am I ;  
 No, when I see thee, wrath forsakes my soul.      430  
 Thou say'st, thou art not Rustum ; be it so !  
 Who art thou then, that canst so touch my soul ?  
 Boy as I am, I have seen battles too—  
 Have waded foremost in their bloody waves  
 And heard their hollow roar of dying men ;  
 But never was my heart thus touch'd before.  
 Are they from Heaven, these softenings of the heart ?  
 O thou old warrior, let us yield to Heaven !  
 Come, plant we here in earth our angry spears,  
 And make a truce, and sit upon this sand,      440  
 And pledge each other in red wine, like friends,  
 And thou shalt talk to me of Rustum's deeds.  
 There are enough foes in the Persian host,  
 Whom I may meet, and strike, and feel no pang ;  
 Champions enough Afrasiab has, whom thou  
 Mayst fight ; fight *them*, when they confront thy spear !  
 But oh, let there be peace 'twixt thee and me !”

He ceased, but while he spake, Rustum had risen,  
 And stood erect, trembling with rage ; his club  
 He left to lie, but had regain'd his spear,      450  
 Whose fiery point now in his mail'd right-hand  
 Blazed bright and baleful, like that autumn-star,  
 The baleful sign of fevers ; dust had soil'd  
 His stately crest, and dimm'd his glittering arms.  
 His breast heaved, his lips foam'd, and twice his voice  
 Was choked with rage ; at last these words broke way :—  
 “Girl ! nimble with thy feet, not with thy hands !

Curl'd minion, dancer, coiner of sweet words !  
 Fight, let me hear thy hateful voice no more !  
 Thou art not in Afrasiab's gardens now 460  
 With Tartar girls, with whom thou art wont to dance ;  
 But on the Oxus-sands, and in the dance  
 Of battle, and with me, who make no play  
 Of war ; I fight it out, and hand to hand.  
 Speak not to me of truce, and pledge, and wine !  
 Remember all thy valour ; try thy feints  
 And cunning ! all the pity I had is gone ;  
 Because thou hast shamed me before both the hosts  
 With thy light skipping tricks, and thy girl's wiles."

He spoke, and Sohrab kindled at his taunts, 470  
 And he too drew his sword : at once they rush'd  
 Together, as two eagles on one prey  
 Come rushing down together from the clouds,  
 One from the east, one from the west ; their shields  
 Dash'd with a clang together, and a din  
 Rose, such as that the sinewy woodcutters  
 Make often in the forest's heart at morn,  
 Of hewing axes, crashing trees—such blows  
 Rustum and Sohrab on each other hail'd.  
 And you would say that sun and stars took part 480  
 In that unnatural conflict ; for a cloud  
 Grew suddenly in Heaven, and dark'd the sun  
 Oyer the fighters' heads ; and a wind rose  
 Under their feet, and moaning swept the plain,  
 And in a sandy whirlwind wrapp'd the pair.  
 In gloom they twain were wrapp'd, and they alone ;  
 For both the on-looking hosts on either hand  
 Stood in broad daylight, and the sky was pure,  
 And the sun sparkled on the Oxus stream.  
 But in the gloom they fought, with bloodshot eyes 490  
 And labouring breath ; first Rustum struck the shield  
 Which Sohrab held stiff out ; the steel-spiked spear  
 Rent the tough plates, but fail'd to reach the skin,

And Rustum pluck'd it back with angry groan.  
 Then Sohrab with his sword smote Rustum's helm,  
 Nor clove its steel quite through ; but all the crest  
 He shore away, and that proud horsehair plume,  
 Never till now defiled, sank to the dust ;  
 And Rustum bow'd his head ; but then the gloom  
 Grew blacker, thunder rumbled in the air, 500  
 And lightnings rent the cloud ; and Ruksh, the horse,  
 Who stood at hand, utter'd a dreadful cry ;—  
 No horse's cry was that, most like the roar  
 Of some pain'd desert-lion, who all day  
 Hath trail'd the hunter's javelin in his side,  
 And comes at night to die upon the sand.  
 The two hosts heard that cry, and quaked for fear,  
 And Oxus curdled as it cross'd his stream.  
 But Sohrab heard, and quail'd not, but rush'd on,  
 And struck again ; and again Rustum bow'd 510  
 His head ; but this time all the blade, like glass,  
 Sprang in a thousand shivers on the helm,  
 And in the hand the hilt remain'd alone.  
 Then Rustum raised his head ; his dreadful eyes  
 Glared, and he shook on high his menacing spear,  
 And shouted : *Rustum !*—Sohrab heard that shout,  
 And shrank amazed ; back he recoil'd one step,  
 And scann'd with blinking eyes the advancing form ;  
 And then he stood bewilder'd ; and he dropp'd 520  
 His covering shield, and the spear pierced his side. 520  
 He reel'd, and staggering back, sank to the ground ;  
 And then the gloom dispersed, and the wind fell,  
 And the bright sun broke forth, and melted all  
 The cloud ; and the two armies saw the pair—  
 Saw Rustum standing, safe upon his feet,  
 And Sohrab, wounded, on the bloody sand.  
 Then, with a bitter smile, Rustum began :—  
 “ Sohrab, thou thoughtest in thy mind to kill  
 A Persian lord this day, and strip his corpse,

And bear thy trophies to Afrasiab's tent. 530  
 Or else that the great Rustum would come down  
 Himself to fight, and that thy wiles would move  
 His heart to take a gift, and let thee go.  
 And then that all the Tartar host would praise  
 Thy courage or thy craft, and spread thy fame,  
 To glad thy father in his weak old age.  
 Fool, thou art slain, and by an unknown man !  
 Dearer to the red jackals shalt thou be  
 Than to thy friends, and to thy father old."

And, with a fearless mien, Sohrab replied : 540  
 "Unknown thou art ; yet thy fierce vaunt is vain.  
 Thou dost not stay me, proud and boastful man !  
 No ! Rustum slays me, and this filial heart.  
 For were I match'd with ten such men as thee,  
 And I were that which till to-day I was,  
 They should be lying here, I standing there.  
 But that belov'd name unnerved my arm—  
 That name, and something, I confess, in thee,  
 Which troubles all my heart, and made my shield  
 Fall ; and thy spear transfix'd an unarm'd foe. 550  
 And now thou boastest, and insult'st my fate.  
 But hear thou this, fierce man, tremble to hear :  
 The mighty Rustum shall avenge my death !  
 My father, whom I seek through all the world,  
 He shall avenge my death, and punish thee !"

As when some hunter in the spring hath found  
 A breeding eagle sitting on her nest,  
 Upon the craggy isle of a hill-lake,  
 And pierced her with an arrow as she rose,  
 And follow'd her to find her where she fell 560  
 Far off ;—anon her mate comes winging back  
 From hunting, and a great way off descries  
 His huddling young left sole : at that, he checks  
 His pinion, and with short uneasy sweeps  
 Circles above his eyry, with loud screams

Chiding his mate back to her nest ; but she  
Lies dying, with the arrow in her side,  
In some far stony gorge cut of his ken,  
A heap of fluttering feathers—never more  
Shall the lake glass her, flying over it ;  
Never the black and dripping precipices  
Echo her stormy scream as she sails by—  
As that poor bird flies home, nor knows his loss,  
So Rustum knew not his own loss, but stood  
Over his dying son, and knew him not.

But, with a cold, incredulous voice, he said :—  
“What prate is this of fathers and revenge ?  
The mighty Rustum never had a son.”

And, with a failing voice, Sohrab replied :—  
“ Ah yes, he had ! and that lost son am I. 580  
Surely the news will one day reach his ear,  
Reach Rustum, where he sits, and tarries long,  
Somewhere, I know not where, but far from here  
And pierce him like a stab, and make him leap  
To arms, and cry for vengeance upon thee.  
Fierce man, bethink thee, for an only son !  
What will that grief, what will that vengeance be ?  
Oh, could I live, till I that grief had seen !  
Yet him I pity not so much, but her  
My mother, who in Ader-baijan dwells 590  
With that old king, her father, who grows grey  
With age, and rules over the valiant Koords.  
Her most I pity, who no more will see  
Sohrab returning from the Tartar camp,  
With spoils and honour, when the war is done.  
But a dark rumour will be bruited up,  
From tribe to tribe, until it reach her ear ;  
And then will that defenceless woman learn  
That Sohrab will rejoice her sight no more,  
But that in battle with a nameless foe, 600  
By the far-distant Oxus, he is slain.”

He spoke ; and as he ceased, he wept aloud,  
Thinking of her he left, and his own death.  
He spoke ; but Rustum listen'd, plunged in thought.  
Nor did he yet believe it was his son  
Who spoke, although he call'd back names he knew ;  
For he had had ~~sure~~ tidings that the babe,  
Which was in Ader-baijan born to him,  
Had been a puny girl, no boy at all—  
So that sad mother sent him word, for fear      610  
Rustum should seek the boy, to train in arms ;  
And so he deem'd that either Sohrab took,  
By a false boast, the style of Rustum's son ;  
Or that men gave it him, to swell his fame.  
So deem'd he, yet he listen'd, plunged in thought  
And his soul set to grief, as the vast tide  
Of the bright rocking Ocean sets to shore  
At the full moon ; tears gather'd in his eyes ;  
For he remember'd his own early youth,  
And all its bounding rapture, as, at dawn,  
The shepherd from his mountain-lodge descries  
A far, bright city, smitten by the sun,  
Through many rolling clouds—so Rustum saw  
His youth ; saw Sohrab's mother, in her bloom ;  
And that old king, her father, who loved well  
His wandering guest, and gave him his fair child  
With joy ; and all the pleasant life they led,  
They three, in that long-distant summer-time—  
The castle, and the dewy woods, and hunt      620  
And hound, and morn on those delightful hills  
In Ader-baijan. And he saw that Youth,  
Of age and looks to be his own dear son,  
Piteous and lovely, lying on the sand,  
Like some rich hyacinth which by the scythe  
Of an unskilful gardener has been cut,  
Mowing the garden grass-plots near its bed,  
And lies, a fragrant tower of purple bloom,      630

On the mown, dying grass—so Sohrab lay,  
Lovely in death, upon the common sand.

And Rustum gazed on him with grief, and said :— 640

“O Sohrab, thou indeed art such a son  
Whom Rustum, wert thou his, might well have loved ?  
Yet here thou errest, Sohrab, or else men  
Have told thee false—thou art not Rustum’s son.  
For Rustum had no son ; one child he had—  
But one—a girl ; who with her mother now  
Plies some light female task, nor dreams of us—  
Of us she dreams not, nor of wounds, nor war.”

But Sohrab answer’d him in wrath ; for now  
The anguish of the deep-fix’d spear grew fierce, 650  
And he desired to draw forth the steel,  
And let the blood flow free, and so to die—  
But first he would convince his stubborn foe ;  
And, rising sternly on one arm, he said :—

“Man, who art thou who dost deny my words ?  
Truth sits upon the lips of dying men,  
And falsehood, while I lived, was far from mine.  
I tell thee, prick’d upon this arm I bear  
That seal which Rustum to my mother gave,  
That she might prick it on the babe she bore.” 660

He spoke ; and all the blood left Rustum’s cheeks,  
And his knees totter’d, and he smote his hand  
Against his breast, his heavy mailed hand,  
That the hard iron corslet clank’d aloud ;  
And to his heart he press’d the other hand,  
And in a hollow voice he spake, and said :

“Sohrab, that were a proof which could not lie !  
If thou show this, then art thou Rustum’s son.”

Then, with weak hasty fingers, Sohrab loosed  
His belt, and near the shoulder bared his arm, 670  
And show’d a sign in faint vermilion points  
Prick’d ; as a cunning workman, in Pekin,  
Pricks with vermilion some clear porcelain vase,

An emperor's gift—at early morn he paints,  
And all day long, and, when night comes, the lamp  
Lights up his studious forehead and thin hands—

So delicately prick'd the sign appear'd  
On Sohrab's arm, the sign of Rustum's seal.

It was that griffin, which of old rear'd Zal,  
Rustum's great father, whom they left to die, 680

A helpless babe, among the mountain-rocks ;  
Him that kind creature found, and rear'd, and loved—  
Then Rustum took it for his glorious sign.

And Sohrab bared that image on his arm,  
And himself scann'd it long with mournful eyes,  
And then he touch'd it with his hand and said :

“ How say'st thou ? Is that sign the proper sign  
Of Rustum's son, or of some other man's ? ”

He spoke ; but Rustum gazed, and gazed, and stood  
Speechless ; and then he utter'd one sharp cry : 690

*O boy—thy father !*—and his voice choked there.

And then a dark cloud pass'd before his eyes,  
And his head swam, and he sank down to earth.

But Sohrab crawl'd to where he lay, and cast  
His arms about his neck, and kiss'd his lips,

And with fond faltering fingers stroked his cheeks,  
Trying to call him back to life ; and life

Came back to Rustum, and he oped his eyes,  
And they stood wide with horror ; and he seized

In both his hands the dust which lay around, 700

And threw it on his head, and smirch'd his hair,—

His hair, and face, and beard, and glittering arms :

And strong convulsive groanings shook his breast,  
And his sobs choked him ; and he clutch'd his sword,  
To draw it, and for ever let life out.

But Sohrab saw his thought, and held his hands,  
And with a soothing voice he spake, and said :—

“ Father, forbear ! for I but meet to-day  
The doom which at my birth was written down

In Heaven, and thou art Heaven's unconscious hand.  
 Surely my heart cried out that it was thou, 711  
 When first I saw thee ; and thy heart spoke too,  
 I know it ! but fate trod these promptings down  
 Under its iron heel ; fate, fate engaged  
 The strife, and hurl'd me on my father's spear  
 But let us speak no more of this ! I find  
 My father ; let me feel that I have found !  
 Come, sit beside me on this sand, and take  
 My head betwixt thy hands, and kiss my cheeks,  
 And wash them with thy tears, and say : *My son !* 720  
 Quick ! quick ! for number'd are my sands of life,  
 And swift ; for like the lightning to this field  
 I came, and like the wind I go away—  
 Sudden, and swift, and like a passing wind.  
 But it was writ in Heaven that this should be."

So said he, and his voice released the heart  
 Of Rustum, and his tears broke forth ; he cast  
 His arms round his son's neck, and wept aloud,  
 And kiss'd him. And awe fell on both the hosts,  
 When they saw Rustum's grief ; and Ruksh, the  
 horse, 731  
 With his head bowing to the ground and mane  
 Sweeping the dust, came near, and in mute woe  
 First to the one then to the other moved  
 His head, as if enquiring what their grief  
 Might mean ; and from his dark, compassionate eyes,  
 The big warm tears roll'd down, and caked the sand.  
 But Rustum chid him with stern voice, and said :  
 "Ruksh, now thou grievest ; but, O Ruksh, thy  
 feet  
 Should first have rotted on their nimble joints,  
 Or ere they brought thy master to this field !" 740

But Sohrab look'd upon the horse and said ;—  
 "Is this, then, Ruksh ? How often, in past days,  
 My mother told me of thee, thou brave steed,

My terrible father's terrible horse ! and said,  
 That I should one day find thy lord and thee.  
 Come, let me lay my hand upon thy mane !  
 O Ruksh, thou art more fortunate than I ;  
 For thou hast gone where I shall never go,  
 And snuff'd the breezes of my father's home.  
 And thou hast trod the sands of Seistan, 750  
 And seen the River of Helmund, and the Lake  
 Of Zirrah ; and the aged Zal himself  
 Has often stroked thy neck, and given thee food,  
 Corn in a golden platter soak'd with wine,  
 And said ; *O Ruksh ! bear Rustum well !*—but I  
 Have never known my grandsire's furrow'd face,  
 Nor seen his lofty house in Seistan,  
 Nor slaked my thirst at the clear Helmund stream ;  
 But lodged among my father's foes, and seen  
 Afrasiab's cities only, Samarcand, 760  
 Bokhara, and lone Khiva in the waste,  
 And the black Toorkmun tents ; and only drunk  
 The desert rivers, Moorghab and Tejend,  
 Kohik, and where the Kalmuks feed their sheep,  
 The northern Sir ; and this great Oxus stream,  
 The yellow Oxus, by whose brink I die."

Then, with a heavy groan, Rustum bewail'd :  
 "Oh, that its waves were flowing over me !  
 Oh, that I saw its grains of yellow silt  
 Roll tumbling in the current o'er my head !" 770

But, with a grave mild voice, Sohrab replied :—  
 "Desire not that, my father ! thou must live.  
 For some are born to do great deeds, and live,  
 As some are born to be obscured, and die.  
 Do thou the deeds I die too young to do,  
 And reap a second glory in thine age ;  
 Thou art my father, and thy gain is mine.  
 But come ! thou seest this great host of men  
 Which follow me ; I pray thee, slay not these !

Let me entreat for them ; what have they done ? 780

They follow'd me, my hope, my fame, my star.

Let them all cross the Oxus back in peace.

But me thou must bear hence, not send with them,  
But carry me with thee to Seistan,

And place me on a bed, and mourn for me,

Thou, and the snow-hair'd Zal, and all thy friends.

And thou must lay me in that lovely earth,

And heap a stately mound above my bones,

And plant a far-seen pillar over all.

That so the passing horseman on the waste

790

May see my tomb a great way off, and cry :

*Sohrab, the mighty Rustum's son, lies there,*

*Whom his great father did in ignorance kill !*

And I be not forgotten in my grave."

And, with a mournful voice, Rustum replied :—

"Fear not ! as thou hast said, Sohrab, my son,

So shall it be ; for I will burn my tents,

And quit the host, and bear thee hence with me,

And carry thee away to Seistan,

And place thee on a bed, and mourn for thee,

800

With the snow-headed Zal, and all my friends.

And I will lay thee in that lovely earth,

And heap a stately mound above thy bones,

And plant a far-seen pillar over all,

And men shall not forget thee in thy grave.

And I will spare thy host ; yea, let them go !

Let them all cross the Oxus back in peace !

What should I do with slaying any more ?

For would that all that I have ever slain

Might be once more alive ; my bitterest foes,

810

And they who were call'd champions in their time,

And through whose death I won that fame I have—

And I were nothing but a common man,

A poor, mean soldier, and without renown ;

So thou mightest live too, my son, my son !

Or rather would that I, even I myself,  
Might now be lying on this bloody sand,  
Near death, and by an ignorant stroke of thine,  
Not thou of mine ! and I might die, not thou ;  
And I, not thou, be borne to Seistan ;  
And Zal might weep above my grave, not thine ;  
And say : *O son, I weep thee not too sore,*  
*For willingly, I know, thou met'st thine end !*  
But now in blood and battles was my youth,  
And full of blood and battles is my age,  
And I shall never end this life of blood."

Then, at the point of death, Sohrab replied :—  
“A life of blood, indeed, thou dreadful man !  
But thou shalt yet have peace ; only not now,  
Not yet ! but thou shalt have it on that day,  
When thou shalt sail in a high-masted ship,  
Thou and the other peers of Kai Khosroo,  
Returning home over the salt blue sea,  
From laying thy dear master in his grave.”

And Rustum gazed in Sohrab's face, and said :—  
“ Soon be that day, my son, and deep that sea !  
Till then, if fate so wills, let me endure.”

He spoke ; and Sohrab smiled on him, and took  
The spear, and drew it from his side, and eased  
His wound's imperious anguish ; but the blood 840  
Came welling from the open gash, and life  
Flow'd with the stream ;—all down his cold white  
    side

The crimson torrent ran, dim now and soil'd,  
Like the soil'd tissue of white violets  
Left, freshly gather'd, on their native bank,  
By children whom their nurses call with haste  
Indoors from the sun's eye ; his head droop'd low,  
His limbs grew slack ; motionless, white, he lay—  
White, with eyes closed ; only when heavy gasps,  
Deep heavy gasps quivering through all his frame. 850

Convulsed him back to life, he open'd them,  
 And fix'd them feebly on his father's face ;  
 Till now all strength was ebb'd, and from his limbs  
 Unwillingly the spirit fled away,  
 Regretting the warm mansion which it left,  
 And youth, and bloom, and this delightful world.

So, on the bloody sand, Sohrab lay dead ;  
 And the great Rustum drew his horseman's cloak  
 Down o'er his face, and sate by his dead son.  
 As those black granite pillars, once high-rear'd      860  
 By Jemshid in Persepolis, to bear  
 His house, now 'mid their broken flights of steps  
 Lie prone, enormous, down the mountain side—  
 So in the sand lay Rustum by his son.

And night came down over the solemn waste,  
 And the two gazing hosts, and that sole pair,  
 And darken'd all ; and a cold fog, with night  
 Crept from the Oxus. Soon a hum arose,  
 As of a great assembly loosed, and fires  
 Began to twinkle through the fog ; for now      870  
 Both armies moved to camp, and took their meal :  
 The Persians took it on the open sands  
 Southward, the Tartars by the river marge ;  
 And Rustum and his son were left alone.

But the majestic river floated on,  
 Out of the mist and hum of that low land,  
 Into the frosty starlight, and there moved,  
 Rejoicing, through the hush'd Chorasmian waste,  
 Under the solitary moon ;—he flow'd  
 Right for the polar star, past Orgunjè,      880  
 Brimming, and bright, and large ; then sands begin  
 To hem his watery march, and dam his streams,  
 And split his currents ; that for many a league  
 The shorn and parcell'd Oxus strains along  
 Through beds of sand and matted rushy isles—  
 Oxus, forgetting the bright speed he had

In his high mountain-cradle in Panire,  
A foil'd circuitous wanderer—till at last  
The long'd-for dash of waves is heard, and wide  
His luminous home of waters opens, bright 890  
And tranquil, from whose floor the new-bathed stars  
Emerge, and shine upon the Aral Sea.

## WILLIAM MORRIS.

### ATALANTA'S RACE.

#### ARGUMENT.

Atalanta, daughter of King Schœneus, not willing to lose her virgin's estate, made it a law to all suitors that they should run a race with her in the public place, and if they failed to overcome her should die unrevenged; and thus many brave men perished. At last came Milanion, the son of Amphidamas, who, outrunning her with the help of Venus, gained the virgin and wedded her.

THROUGH thick Arcadian woods a hunter went,  
Following the beasts up, on a fresh spring day ;  
But since his horn-tipped bow but seldom bent  
Now at the noontide nought had happed to slay,  
Within a vale he called his hounds away,  
Harkening the echoes of his lone voice cling  
About the cliffs and through the beech-trees ring.

But when they ended, still awhile he stood,  
And but the sweet familiar thrush could hear,  
And all the day-long noises of the wood,  
And o'er the dry leaves of the vanished year  
His hounds' feet patterning as they drew anear,  
And heavy breathing from their heads low hung,  
To see the mighty cernel bow unstrung.

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Then smiling did he turn to leave the place,  
But with his first step some new fleeting thought  
A shadow cast across his sun-burnt face ;

I think the golden net that April brought  
 From some warni world his wavering soul had caught ;  
 For, sunk in vague sweet longing, did he go                   20  
 Petwixt the trees with doubtful steps and slow.

\* Yet howsoever slow he went, at last  
 The trees grew sparser, and the wood was done ;  
 Whereon one farewell backward look he cast,  
 Then, turning round to see what place was won,  
 With shaded eyes looked underneath the sun,  
 And o'er green meads and new-turned furrows brown  
 Beheld the gleaming of King Schoeneus' town.

So thitherward he turned, and on each side  
 The folk were busy on the teeming land,                   30  
 And man and maid from the brown furrows cried,  
 Or midst the newly-blossomed vines did stand,  
 And as the rustic weapon pressed the hand  
 Thought of the nodding of the well-filled ear,  
 Or how the knife the heavy bunch should shear.

Merry it was : about him sung the birds,  
 The spring flowers bloomed along the firm dry road,  
 The sleek-skinned mothers of the sharp-horned herds  
 Now for the barefoot milking-maidens lowed ;  
 While from the freshness of his blue abode,                   40  
 Glad his death-bearing arrows to forget,  
 The broad sun blazed, nor scattered plagues as yet.

Through such fair things unto the gates he came,  
 And found them open, as though peace were there ;  
 Wherethrough, unquestioned of his race or name,  
 He entered, and along the streets 'gan fare,  
 Which at the first of folk were well-nigh bare ;  
 But pressing on, and going more hastily,  
 Men hurrying too he 'gan at last to see.

Following the last of these, he still pressed on,           50  
 Until an open space he came unto,

Where wreaths of fame had oft been lost and won,  
 For feats of strength folk there were wont to do.  
 And now our hunter looked for something new,  
 Because the whole wide space was bare, and stilled  
 The high seats were, with eager people filled.

There with the others to a seat he gat,  
 Whence he beheld a broidered canopy,  
 'Neath which in fair array King Schoeneus sat  
 Upon his throne with councillors thereby ;      60  
 And underneath his well-wrought seat and high,  
 He saw a golden image of the sun,  
 A silver image of the Fleet-foot One.

A brazen altar stood beneath their feet  
 Whereon a thin flame flickered in the wind,  
 Nigh this a herald clad in raiment meet  
 Made ready even now his horn to wind,  
 By whom a huge man held a sword, entwined  
 With yellow flowers ; these stood a little space  
 From off the altar, nigh the starting-place.      70

And there two runners did the sign abide  
 Foot set to foot—a young man slim and fair,  
 Crisp-haired, well knit, with firm limbs often tried  
 In places where no man his strength may spare ;  
 Dainty his thin coat was, and on his hair  
 A golden circlet of renown he wore,  
 And in his hand an olive garland bore.

But on this day with whom shall he contend ?  
 A maid stood by him like Diana clad  
 When in the woods she lists her bow to bend,      80  
 Too fair for one to look on and be glad,  
 Who scarcely yet has thirty summers had,  
 If he must still behold her from afar ;  
 Too fair to let the world live free from war.

She seemed all earthly matters to forget ;  
Of all tormenting lines her face was clear ;  
Her wide grey eyes upon the goal were set  
Calm and unmoved as though no soul were near ;  
But her foe trembled as a man in fear,  
Nor from her loveliness one moment turned  
His anxious face with fierce desire that burned. 90

Now through the hush there broke the trumpet's clang  
Just as the setting sun made eventide.  
Then from light feet a spurt of dust there sprang,  
And swiftly were they running side by side ;  
But silent did the thronging folk abide  
Until the turning-post was reached at last,  
And round about it still abreast they passed.

But when the people saw how close they ran,  
When half-way to the starting-point they were, 100  
A cry of joy broke forth, whereat the man  
Headed the white-foot runner, and drew near  
Unto the very end of all his fear ;  
And scarce his straining feet the ground could feel,  
And bliss un hoped for o'er his heart 'gan steal.

But midst the loud victorious shouts he heard  
Her footsteps drawing nearer, and the sound  
Of fluttering raiment, and thereat afeard  
His flushed and eager face he turned around,  
And even then he felt her past him bound  
Fleet as the wind, but scarcely saw her there  
Till on the goal she laid her fingers fair.

There stood she breathing like a little child  
Amid some warlike clamour laid asleep,  
For no victorious joy her red lips smiled,  
Her cheek its wonted freshness did but keep ;  
No glance lit up her clear grey eyes and deep,

Though some divine thought softened all her face  
As once more rang the trumpet through the place.

But her late foe stopped short amidst his course, 120  
One moment gazed upon her piteously,  
Then with a groan his lingering feet did force  
To leave the spot whence her eyes could see ;  
And, changed like one who knows his time must be  
But short and bitter, without any word  
He knelt before the bearer of the sword ;

Then high rose up the gleaming deadly blade,  
Bared of its flowers, and through the crowded place  
Was silence now, and midst of it the maid  
Went by the poor wretch at a gentle pace, 130  
And he to hers upturned his sad white face ;  
Nor did his eyes behold another sight  
Ere on his soul there fell eternal night.

So was the pageant ended, and all folk  
Talking of this and that familiar thing  
In little groups from that sad concourse broke,  
For now the shrill bats were upon the wing,  
And soon dark night would slay the evening,  
And in dark gardens sang the nightingale  
Her little-heeded, oft-repeated tale. 140

And with the last of all the hunter went,  
Who, wondering at the strange sight he had seen,  
Prayed an old man to tell him what it meant,  
Both why the vanquished man so slain had been,  
And if the maiden were an earthly queen,  
Or rather what much more she seemed to be,  
No sharer in the world's mortality.

“Stranger,” said he, “I pray she soon may die  
Whose lovely youth hath slain so many an one !

King Schoeneus' daughter is she verily, 150  
 Who when her eyes first looked upon the sun  
 Was fain to end her life but new begun,  
 For he had vowed to leave but men alone  
 Sprung from his loins when he from earth was gone.

“Therefore he bade one leave her in the wood,  
 And let wild things deal with her as they might,  
 But this being done, some cruel god thought good  
 To save her beauty in the world's despite :  
 Folk say that her, so delicate and white  
 As now she is, a rough root-grubbing bear 160  
 Amidst her shapeless cubs at first did rear.

“In course of time the woodfolk slew her nurse,  
 And to their rude abode the youngling brought,  
 And reared her up to be a kingdom's curse ;  
 Who grown a woman, of no kingdom thought,  
 But armed and swift, 'mid beasts destruction wrought,  
 Nor spared two shaggy centaur kings to slay  
 To whom her body seemed an easy prey.

“So to this city, led by fate, she came  
 Whom known by signs, whereof I cannot tell, 170  
 King Schoeneus for his child at last did claim,  
 Nor otherwhere since that day doth she dwell  
 Sending too many a noble soul to hell—  
 What ! thine eyes glisten ! what then, thinkest thou  
 Her shining head unto the yoke to bow ?

“Listen, my son, and love some other maid  
 For she the saffron gown will never wear,  
 And on no flower-strewn couch shall she be laid,  
 Nor shall her voice make glad a lover's ear :  
 Yet if of Death thou hast not any fear, 180  
 Yea, rather, if thou lov'st him utterly,  
 Thou still may'st woo her ere thou com'st to die,

“Like him that on this day thou sawest lie dead ;  
 For, fearing as I deem the sea-born one,  
 The maid has vowed e'en such a man to wed  
 As in the course her swift feet can outrun,  
 But whoso fails herein, his days are done :  
 He came the nighest that was slain to-day,  
 Although with him I deem she did but play.

“Behold, such mercy Atalanta gives 190  
 To those that long to win her loveliness ;  
 Be wise ! be sure that many a maid there lives  
 Gentler than she, of beauty little less,  
 Whose swimming eyes thy loving words shall bless,  
 When in some garden, knee set close to knee,  
 Thou sing'st the song that love may teach to thee.”

So to the hunter spake that ancient man,  
 And left him for his own home presently :  
 But he turned round, and through the moonlight wan  
 Reached the thick wood, and there 'twixt tree and tree  
 Distraught he passed the long night feverishly, 201  
 'Twixt sleep and waking, and at dawn arose  
 To wage hot war against his speechless foes.

There to the hart's flank seemed his shaft to grow,  
 As panting down the broad green glades he flew,  
 There by his horn the Dryads well might know  
 His thrust against the bear's heart had been true,  
 And there Adonis' bane his javelin slew,  
 But still in vain through rough and smooth he went,  
 For none the more his restlessness was spent. 210

So wandering, he to Argive cities came,  
 And in the lists with valiant men he stood,  
 And by great deeds he won him praise and fame,  
 And heaps of wealth for little-valued blood ;  
 But none of all these things, or life, seemed good

Unto his heart, where still unsatisfied  
A ravenous longing warred with fear and pride.

Therefore it happed when but a month had gone  
Since he had left King Schoeneus' city old,  
In hunting-gear again, again alone 220  
The forest-bordered meads did he behold,  
Where still mid thoughts of August's quivering gold  
Folk hoed the wheat, and clipped the vine in trust  
Of faint October's purple-foaming must.

And once again he passed the peaceful gate,  
While to his beating heart his lips did lie,  
That owning not victorious love and fate,  
Said, half aloud, "And here too must I try,  
To win of alien men the mastery,  
And gather for my head fresh meed of fame 230  
And cast new glory on my father's name."

In spite of that, how beat his heart, when first  
Folk said to him, "And art thou come to see  
That which still makes our city's name accurst  
Among all mothers for its cruelty ?  
Then know indeed that fate is good to thee  
Because to morrow a new luckless one  
Against the whitefoot maid is pledged to run."

So on the morrow with no curious eyes  
As once he did, that piteous sight he saw, 240  
Nor did that wonder in his heart arise  
As toward the goal the conquering maid 'gan draw,  
Nor did he gaze upon her eyes with awe,  
Too full the pain of longing filled his heart  
For fear or wonder there to have a part.

But O, how long the night was ere it went !  
How long it was before the dawn begun

Showed to the wakening birds the sun's intent  
 That not in darkness should the world be done !  
 And then, and then, how long before the sun 250  
 Bade silently the toilers of the earth  
 Get forth to fruitless cares or empty mirth !

And long it seemed that in the market-place  
 He stood and saw the chaffering folk go by,  
 Ere from the ivory throne King Schœneus' face  
 Looked down upon the murmur royally,  
 But then came trembling that the time was nigh  
 When he midst pitying looks his love must claim,  
 And jeering voices must salute his name.

But as the throng he pierced to gain the throne, 260  
 His alien face distraught and anxious told  
 What hopeless errand he was bound upon,  
 And, each to each, folk whispered to behold  
 His godlike limbs ; nay, and one woman old  
 As he went by must pluck him by the sleeve -  
 And pray him yet that wretched love to leave.

For sidling up she said, "Canst thou live twice,  
 Fair son ? canst thou have joyful youth again,  
 That thus thou goest to the sacrifice  
 Thyself the victim ? nay then, all in vain. 270  
 Thy mother bore her longing and her pain,  
 And one more maiden on the earth must dwell  
 Hopeless of jey, nor fearing death and hell.

"O, fool, thou knowest not the compact then  
 That with the threeformed goddess she has made  
 To keep her from the loving lips of men,  
 And in no saffron gown to be arrayed,  
 And therewithal with glory to be paid,  
 And love of her the moonlit river sees  
 White 'gainst the shadow of the formless trees. 280

"Come back, and I myself will pray for thee  
 Unto the sea-born framer of delights,  
 To give thee her who on the earth may be  
 The fairest stirrer up to death and fights,  
 To quench with hopeful days and joyous nights  
 The flame that doth thy youthful heart consume :  
 Come back, nor give thy beauty to the tomb."

How should he listen to her earnest speech ?  
 Words, such as he not once or twice had said  
 Unto himself, whose meaning scarce could reach 290  
 The firm abode of that sad hardihead—  
 He turned about, and through the marketstead  
 Swiftly he passed, until before the throne  
 In the cleared space he stood at last alone.

Then said the King, "Stranger, what dost thou here ?  
 Have any of my folk done ill to thee ?  
 Or art thou of the forest men in fear ?  
 Or art thou of the sad fraternity  
 Who still will strive my daughter's mates to be,  
 Staking their lives to win to earthly bliss 300  
 The lonely maid, the friend of Artemis ?"

"O King," he said, "thou sayest the word indeed ;  
 Nor will I quit the strife till I have won  
 My sweet delight, or death to end my need.  
 And know that I am called Milanion,  
 Of King Amphidamas the well-loved son :  
 So fear not that to thy old name, O King,  
 Much loss or shame my victory will bring."

"Nay, Prince," said Schœneus, "welcome to this land  
 Thou wert indeed, if thou wert here to try 310  
 Thy strength 'gainst some one mighty of his hand ;  
 Nor would we grudge thee well-won mastery.  
 But now, why wilt thou come to me to die,

And at my door lay down thy luckless head,  
Swelling the band of the unhappy dead,

“ Whose curses even now my heart doth fear?  
Lo, I am old, and know what life can be,  
And what a bitter thing is death anear.  
O Son ! be wise, and hearken unto me,  
And if no other can be dear to thee,  
At least as now, yet is the world full wide,  
And bliss in seeming hopeless hearts may hide :

320

“But if thou losest life, then all is lost.”  
“Nay, King,” Milanion said, “thy words are vain.  
Doubt not that I have counted well the cost.  
But say, on what day wilt thou that I gain  
Fulfilled delight, or death to end my pain.  
Right glad were I if it could be to-day,  
And all my doubts at rest for ever lay.”

" Nay," said King Schoeneus, " thus it shall not be, 330  
But rather shalt thou let a month go by,  
And weary with thy prayers for victory  
What god thou know'st the kindest and most nigh.  
So doing, still perchance thou shalt not die:  
And with my goodwill wouldest thou have the maid,  
For of the equal gods I grow afraid.

"And until then, O Prince, be thou my guest,  
And all these troubrous things awhile forget."

"Nay," said he, "couldst thou give my soul good rest,  
And on mine head a sleepy garland set, 340  
Then had I 'scaped the meshes of the net,  
Nor shouldst thou hear from me another word ;  
But now, make sharp thy fearful heading-sword.

" Yet will I do what son of man may do,  
And promise all the gods may most desire.

That to myself I may at least be true ;  
 And on that day my heart and limbs so tire,  
 With utmost strain and measureless desire,  
 That, at the worst, I may but fall asleep  
 When in the sunlight round that sword shall sweep." 350

He went therewith, nor anywhere would bide,  
 But unto Argos restlessly did wend ;  
 And there, as one who lays all hope aside,  
 Because the leech has said his life must end,  
 Silent farewell he bade to foe and friend,  
 And took his way unto the restless sea,  
 For there he deemed his rest and help might be.

UPON the shore of Argolis there stands  
 A temple to the goddess that he sought,  
 That, turned unto the lion-bearing lands, 360  
 Fenced from the east, of cold winds hath no thought,  
 Though to no homestead there the sheaves are brought,  
 No groaning press torments the close-clipped murk,  
 Lonely the fane stands, far from all men's work.

Pass through a close, set thick with myrtle-trees,  
 Through the brass doors that guard the holy place,  
 And entering, hear the washing of the seas  
 That twice a-day rise high above the base,  
 And with the south-west urging them, embrace  
 The marble feet of her that standeth there 370  
 That shrink not, naked though they be and fair.

Small is the fane through which the seawind sings  
 About Queen Venus' well-wrought image white,  
 But hung around are many precious things,  
 The gifts of those who, longing for delight,  
 Have hung them there within the goddess' sight,  
 And in return have taken at her hands  
 The living treasures of the Grecian lands.

And thither now has come Milanion,  
 And showed unto the priests' wide open eyes  
 Gifts fairer than all those that there have shone,  
 Silk cloths, inwrought with Indian fantasies,  
 And bowls inscribed with sayings of the wise  
 Above the deeds of foolish living things ;  
 And mirrors fit to be the gifts of kings.

380

And now before the Sea-born One he stands,  
 By the sweet veiling smoke made dim and soft,  
 And while the incense trickles from his hands,  
 And while the odorous smoke-wreaths hang aloft,  
 Thus doth he pray to her : "O Thou, who oft  
 Hast holpen man and maid in their distress  
 Despise me not for this my wretchedness !

390

"O goddess, among us who dwell below,  
 Kings and great men, great for a little while,  
 Have pity on the lowly heads that bow,  
 Nor hate the hearts that love them without guile ;  
 Wilt thou be worse than these, and is thy smile  
 A vain device of him who set thee here,  
 An empty dream of some artificer ?

"O, great one, some men love, and are ashamed ; 400  
 Some men are weary of the bonds of love ;  
 Yea, and by some men lightly art thou blamed,  
 That from thy toils their lives they cannot move,  
 And 'mid the ranks of men their manhood prove.  
 Alas ! O goddess, if thou slayest me  
 What new immortal can I serve but thee ?

"Think then, will it bring honour to thy head  
 If folk say, 'Everything aside he cast  
 And to all fame and honour was he dead,  
 And to his one hope now is dead at last  
 Since all unholpen he is gone and past : 410

Ah, the gods love not man, for certainly,  
He to his helper did not cease to cry.'

"Nay, but thou wilt help ; they who died before  
Not single-hearted as I deem came here,  
Therefore unthanked they laid their gifts before  
Thy stainless feet, still shivering with their fear,  
Lest in their eyes their true thought might appear,  
Who sought to be the lords of that fair town,  
Dreaded of men and winners of renown.

420

"O Queen, thou knowest I pray not for this :  
O set us down together in some place  
Where not a voice can break our heaven of bliss,  
Where nought but rocks and I can see her face,  
Softening beneath the marvel of thy grace,  
Where not a foot our vanished steps can track—  
The golden age, the golden age come back !

"O fairest, hear me now who do thy will  
Plead for thy rebel that she be not slain,  
But live and love and be thy servant still ;  
Ah, give her joy and take away my pain,  
And thus two long-enduring servants gain.  
An easy thing this is to do for me,  
What need of my vain words to weary thee.

430

"But none the less, this place will I not leave  
Until I needs must go my death to meet,  
Or at thy hands some happy sign receive  
That in great joy we twain may one day greet  
Thy presence here and kiss thy silver feet,  
Such as we deem thee, fair beyond all words,  
Victorious o'er our servants and our lords."

440

Then from the altar back a space he drew,  
But from the Queen turned not his face away,

But 'gainst a pillar leaned, until the blue  
 That arched the sky, at ending of the day,  
 Was turned to ruddy gold and changing grey,  
 And clear, but low, the nigh-ebbed windless sea  
 In the still evening murmured ceaselessly.

And there he stood when all the sun was down,  
 Nor had he moved, when the dim golden light, 450  
 Like the far lustre of a godlike town,  
 Had left the world to seeming hopeless night,  
 Nor would he move the more when wan moonlight  
 Streamed through the pillars for a little while,  
 And lighted up the white Queen's changeless smile.

Nought noted he the shallow-flowing sea  
 As step by step it set the wrack a-swim ;  
 The yellow torchlight nothing noted he  
 Wherein with fluttering gown and half-bared limb  
 The temple damsels sung their midnight hymn ; 460  
 And nought the doubled stillness of the fane  
 When they were gone and all was hushed again.

But when the waves had touched the marble base,  
 And steps the fish swim over twice a-day,  
 The dawn beheld him sunken in his place  
 Upon the floor ; and sleeping there he lay,  
 Not heeding aught the little jets of spray  
 The roughened sea brought nigh, across him cast,  
 For as one dead all thought from him had passed.

Yet long before the sun had showed his head, 470  
 Long ere the varied hangings on the wall  
 Had gained once more their blue and green and red,  
 He rose as one some well-known sign doth call  
 When war upon the city's gates doth fall,  
 And scarce like one fresh risen out of sleep,  
 He 'gan again his broken watch to keep.

Then he turned round ; not for the sea-gull's cry  
 That wheeled above the temple in his flight,  
 Not for the fresh south wind that lovingly  
 Breathed on the new-born day and dying night, 480  
 But some strange hope 'twixt fear and great delight  
 Drew round his face, now flushed, now pale and wan,  
 And still constrained his eyes the sea to scan.

Now a faint light lit up the southern sky,  
 Not sun or moon, for all the world was grey,  
 But this a bright cloud seemed, that drew anigh,  
 Lighting the dull waves that beneath it lay  
 As toward the temple still it took its way,  
 And still grew greater, till Milanion  
 Saw nought for dazzling light that round him shone. 490

But as he staggered with his arms outspread,  
 Delicious unnamed odours breathed around,  
 For languid happiness he bowed his head,  
 And with wet eyes sank down upon the ground,  
 Nor wished for aught, nor any dream he found  
 To give him reason for that happiness,  
 Or make him ask more knowledge of his bliss.

At last his eyes were cleared, and he could see  
 Through happy tears the goddess face to face  
 With that faint image of Divinity, 500  
 Whose well-wrought smile and dainty changeless grace  
 Until that morn so gladdened all the place ;  
 Then he unwitting cried aloud her name  
 And covered up his eyes for fear and shame.

But through the stillness he her voice could hear  
 Piercing his heart with joy scarce bearable,  
 That said, "Milanion, wherefore dost thou fear  
 I am not hard to those who love me well ;  
 List to what I a second time will tell,

And thou mayest hear perchance, and live to save 510  
 'The cruel maiden from a loveless grave.

“ See, by my feet three golden apples lie—  
 Such fruit among the heavy roses falls,  
 Such fruit my watchful damsels carefully  
 Store up within the best loved of my walls.  
 Ancient Damascus, where the lover calls  
 Above my unseen head, and faint and light  
 The rose-leaves flutter round me in the night.

“ And note, that these are not alone most fair  
 With heavenly gold, but longing strange they bring 520  
 Unto the hearts of men, who will not care  
 Beholding these, for any once-loved thing  
 Till round the shining sides their fingers cling.  
 And thou shalt see thy well-girt swiftfoot maid  
 By sight of these amidst her glory stayed.

“ For bearing these within a scrip with thee,  
 When first she heads thee from the starting-place  
 Cast down the first one for her eyes to see,  
 And when she turns aside make on apace,  
 And if again she heads thee in the race 530  
 Spare not the other two to cast aside  
 If she not long enough behind will bide.

“ Farewell, and when has come the happy time  
 That she Diana's raiment must unbind  
 And all the world seems blessed with Saturn's clime,  
 And thou with eager arms about her twined  
 Beholdest first her grey eyes growing kind,  
 Surely, O trembler, thou shalt scarcely then  
 Forget the Helper of unhappy men.”

Milanion raised his head at this last word 540  
 For now so soft and kind she seemed to be

No longer of her Godhead was he feared ;  
 Too late he looked ; for nothing could he see  
 But the white image glimmering doubtfully  
 In the departing twilight cold and grey,  
 And those three apples on the steps that lay.

These then he caught up quivering with delight,  
 Yet fearful lest it all might be a dream ;  
 And though aweary with the watchful night,  
 And sleepless nights of longing, still did deem  
 He could not sleep ; but yet the first sunbeam  
 That smote the fane across the heaving deep  
 Shone on him laid in calm untroubled sleep.

But little ere the noontide did he rise,  
 And why he felt so happy scarce could tell  
 Until the gleaming apples met his eyes.  
 Then leaving the fair place where this befell  
 Oft he looked back as one who loved it well,  
 Then homeward to the haunts of men 'gan wend  
 To bring all things unto a happy end.

550

560

Now has the lingering month at last gone by,  
 Again are all folk round the running place,  
 Nor other seems the dismal pageantry  
 Than heretofore, but that another face  
 Looks o'er the smooth course ready for the race,  
 For now, beheld of all, Milanion  
 Stands on the spot he twice has looked upon.

But yet—what change is this that holds the maid ?  
 Does she indeed see in his glittering eye  
 More than disdain of the sharp shearing blade,  
 Some happy hope of help and victory ?  
 The others seemed to say, " We come to die,  
 Look down upon us for a little while,  
 That dead, we may bethink us of thy smile."

570

But he—what look of mastery was this  
 He cast on her? why were his lips so red?  
 Why was his face so flushed with happiness?  
 So looks not one who deems himself but dead,  
 E'en if to death he bows a willing head;  
 So rather looks a god well pleased to find  
 Some earthly damsel fashioned to his mind.

580

Why must she drop her lids before his gaze,  
 And even as she casts adown her eyes  
 Redden to note his eager glance of praise,  
 And wish that she were clad in other guise?  
 Why must the memory to her heart arise  
 Of things unnoticed when they first were heard.  
 Some lover's song, some answering maiden's word?

What makes these longings, vague, without a name,  
 And this vain pity never felt before, 590  
 This sudden languor, this contempt of fame,  
 This tender sorrow for the time past o'er,  
 These doubts that grow each minute more and more?  
 Why does she tremble as the time grows near,  
 And weak defeat and woeful victory fear?

Now while she seemed to hear her beating heart,  
 Above their heads the trumpet blast rang out  
 And forth they sprang; and she must play her part.  
 Then flew her white feet, knowing not a doubt,  
 Though slackening once, she turned her head about, 600  
 But then she cried aloud and faster fled  
 Than e'er before, and all men deemed him dead.

But with no sound he raised aloft his hand,  
 And thence what seemed a ray of light there flew  
 And past the maid rolled on along the sand;  
 Then trembling she her feet together drew  
 And in her heart a strong desire there grew

To have the toy ; some god she thought had given  
That gift to her, to make of earth a heaven,

Then from the course with eager steps she ran, 610  
And in her odorous bosom laid the gold.  
But when she turned again, the great-limbed man,  
Now well ahead she failed not to behold,  
And mindful of her glory waxing cold,  
Sprang up and followed him in hot pursuit,  
Though with one hand she touched the golden fruit.

Note too, the bow that she was wont to bear  
She laid aside to grasp the glittering prize,  
And o'er her shoulder from the quiver fair  
Three arrows fell and lay before her eyes 620  
Unnoticed, as amidst the people's cries  
She sprang to head the strong Milanion,  
Who now the turning-post had well-nigh won.

But as he set his mighty hand on it  
White fingers underneath his own were laid,  
And white limbs from his dazzled eyes did flit,  
Then he the second fruit cast by the maid :  
She ran awhile, and then as one afraid  
Wavered and stopped, and turned and mad, no stay,  
Until the globe with its bright fellow lay. 630

Then, as a troubled glance she cast around  
Now far ahead the Argive could she see,  
And in her garment's hem one hand she wound  
To keep the double prize, and strenuously,  
Sped o'er the course, and little doubt had she  
To win the day, though now but scanty space  
Was left betwixt him and the winning place.

Short was the way unto such winged feet,  
Quickly she gained upon him till at last

He turned about her eager eyes to meet  
 And from his hand the third fair apple cast.  
 She wavered not, but turned and ran so fast  
 After the prize that should her bliss fulfil,  
 That in her hand it lay ere it was still.

640

Nor did she rest, but turned al out to win  
 Once more, an unblest woeful victory—  
 And yet—and yet—why does her breath begin  
 To fail her, and her feet drag heavily ?  
 Why fails she now to see if far or nigh  
 The goal is ? why do her grey eyes grow dim ?  
 Why do these tremors run through every limb ?

650

She spreads her arms abroad some stay to find  
 Else must she fall, indeed, and findeth this,  
 A strong man's arms about her body twined.  
 Nor may she shudder now to feel his kiss,  
 So wrapped she is in new unbroken bliss :  
 Made happy that the foe the prize hath won,  
 She weeps glad tears for all her glory done.

SHATTER the trumpet, hew adown the posts !  
 Upon the brazen altar break the sword,  
 And scatter incense to appease the ghosts  
 Of those who died here by their own award.  
 Bring forth the image of the mighty Lord,  
 And her who unseen o'er the runners hung,  
 And did a deed for ever to be sung.

660

Here are the gathered folk ; make no delay,  
 Open King Schoeneus' well-filled treasury,  
 Bring out the gifts long hid from light of day,  
 The golden bowls o'erwrought with imagery,  
 Gold chains, and unguents brought from over sea,  
 The saffron gown the old Phœnician brought,  
 Within the temple of the Goddess wrought.

670

O ye, O damsels, who shall never see  
Her, that Love's servant bringeth now to you,  
Returning from another victory,  
In some cool bower do all that now is due ?  
Since she in token of her service new  
Shall give to Venus offerings rich enow,  
Her maiden zone, her arrows, and her bower.

## SIR SAMUEL FERGUSON

### CONARY.

FULL peace was Erin's under Conary,  
Till—though his brethren by the tender tie  
Of fosterage—Don Dessa's lawless sons,  
Fer-ger, Fer-gel, and vengeful Fergobar,  
For crimes that justly had demanded death,  
By judgment mild he sent in banishment ;  
Yet wrung his own fraternal heart the while.  
Whose brothers, Ferragon and Lomna Druth,  
Drawn by affection's ties, and thinking scorn  
To stay behind while others led the way  
To brave adventure, in their exile joined. .

10

Banished the land of Erin, on the sea  
They roamed, and, roaming, with the pirate-hordes  
Of British Ingcel leagued ; and this their pact :  
The spoil of Britain's and of Alba's coasts  
To fall to them ; and Erin's counter-spoil  
To fall to Ingcel. Britain's borders first  
They ravaged ; and in one pernicious raid  
Of sack and slaughter indiscriminate,  
Ingcel's own father and his brethren seven,  
By chance sojourning with the victims, slew.  
Then, Alba sack'd, said Ingcel, " Steer we now  
"For Erin, and the promised counter-spoil."

20

" "Tis just ; and welcome to our souls as well  
" For outrage unavenged," said Fergobar.

"'Tis just : it is thy right," said Ferragon.

"'Tis just, and woe it is !" said Lonna Druth.

'Twas then that Conary from strife composed  
By kingly counsel, 'twixt contending lords  
Of distand Thomond, held his journey home.      30  
But, when in sight of Tara, lo, the sky  
On every side reflected rising flame  
And gleam of arms. "What this ?" cried Conary.

A certain druid was there in the train  
Who answered, "Often did I warn thee, King,  
"This journey at this season was ill-timed,  
"As made in violation of the *gaysh*  
"That King of Tara shall not judge a cause  
"Except in Tara's proper judgment hall  
"From Beltane-day to May-day."

"Yea, in truth,      40  
"I do remember now," said Conary,  
"Amongst my prohibitions that is one,  
"Which thoughtlessly I've broken. Strange it is  
"That act for speedy justice and for peace  
"Accomplished, should, with God, be disesteem'd.  
"But, since Religion's awful voice forbids,  
"I pray forgiveness of offended Heaven,  
"Whose anger at my fault too plain I see,  
"And vow atonement at thy own award.  
"But, which way now ?"

"Ride northward to the track      50  
"Where Street Midluachra and Street Cualann join ;  
"There, choice of highway waits us, north or south."  
Northward they rode. "What be these moving brakes  
"Before us ? Nay, 'tis but a running drove  
"Of antler'd stags. Whence come they, and whence come  
"These darkening flights of fowl above our heads ?"  
"These the wild brood of Clane-Milcarna's dens :"  
Replied the druid. "It is another *gaysh*

“ For Tara’s King to see them leave their lairs  
 “ After mid-lay : and ill will come of it.” 60

“ Omens of evil gather round my path,  
 “ Though thought of evil in my breast is none,”  
 Said Conary, and heaved a heavy sigh ;  
 “ Yet, since I reign by law, and holy men  
 “ Charged with the keeping of the law, declare  
 “ Thou shalt not so-and-so, at such a time,  
 “ Do or leave undone, it beseems not me  
 “ To question for what end the law is so :  
 “ Though, were it but a human ordinance,  
 “ Twere, haply, counted childish : but, go to, 70  
 “ I own another violated *gaysh* ;  
 “ I pray forgiveness of offended Heaven ;  
 “ And, since some fierce invading enemy —  
 “ Misguided brothers, that it be not you ! —  
 “ Bars our approach to Tara, let us chuse  
 “ Cualann highroad ; for Cualann-ward there dwells  
 “ One whom I once befriended : and I know  
 “ His home will give me shelter for to-night,  
 “ Knew I aright the way that leads to it.”

“ Name of the man, oh King ?” demanded Cecht 80  
 (Fly ye, foes all, fly ye before the face  
 Of Cecht, the battle-sidesman of the King !)  
 The biggest man yet gentlest-countenanced  
 Of all that rode in Conary’s company.  
 “ Da-Derga he,” said Conary.

“ Ride on,”  
 Said Cecht. “ Street Cualann whereon now we are  
 “ Leads straight to Bru’n-Da-Derga, and leads straight  
 “ Through and beyond it. ’Tis a house of rest  
 “ For all that come and go ; where ready still  
 “ The traveller finds the wind-dried fuel stack’d, 90  
 “ The cauldron slung, and ale-vat on the floor.  
 “ A strong, fast mansion. Seven good doors it has,

"And seven good benches betwixt door and door,  
"And seven good couches spread 'twixt bench and bench.  
"All that attend thee now, and all that come—  
"See where they come along Midluachra track,  
"The host of Enain, in good time I judge,  
"Journeying south—shall nothing want for room.  
"I shall go forward: for my duty it is  
"To enter first at nightfall, when my king  
"Comes to his lodging; and with flint and steel  
"Kindle the fire whose flame shall guide him home."

Then forth, at gallop of his steeds, went Cecht ;  
While, slower following, Conary was aware  
Of three that rode before them on the way.  
Red were their coursers and their mantles red,  
Red, too, their caps, blood-red—

"Another *gaysh*,"

Said Conary. "I also call to mind  
"Amid my prohibitions this is one,  
"To follow three red riders on the way ; 110  
"Injunction idle, were it not divine.  
"After them, Ferflath ; stay them till we pass."

Then the light lad young Ferflath, Conary's son  
Sprang forth at gallop on the red men's track,  
And called his message shrilly from behind,  
But failed to overtake them. He who rode  
Last of the triad sang him back a lay—

“ Water, oh youth, oh slight swift-riding youth,  
“ On back, on neck, on shoulder lightly borne.  
“ Water will quench ; fire burn ; and shocks of hair      120  
“ At horrid tidings, upon warriors’ heads  
“ Bristle as reeds in water ; water ; ho ! ”

Ferflath returned, and told to Conary  
The lay the red man sang ; "and, sir," he said,  
"I rode, I think, as seemly as himself,  
"And know not what he meant ; but sure I am

"These are not men of mankind, as we are,  
"But fairy-men and ministers of ill."

"Now then," said Conary, "let every *gaysh*  
"That dread Religion with hard-knotting hand 130  
"Binds on the King of Tara, for to-day  
"Be broken! Let them go. They may precede;  
"May tie their red steeds at the great hall door,  
"And choose their seats within; and I, the King,  
"May follow, and accept the traveller's place  
"Last to attain the inn. Well, be it so:  
"Respect departs with fortune's one-day change.  
"But, friends, despond not, you. Though few we be  
"In midst of these marauders (oh, my heart  
"Forbid the rising thought that these be they!), 140  
"Yet shall we soon be many; for they come,  
"They whom on Street Midluachra late we saw,  
"Now following on Street Cualann. In good time  
"They join us; for, be sure such chariot-throng  
"Leaves not the borders of the warlike North,  
"But champions good come with it. Let us in."

While thus fared Conary, the pirates' scouts  
Who watched the coast, put off to where the fleet,  
Stay'd on the heaving ridges of the main,  
Lay off Ben-Edar. Ingcel's galley reached, 150  
High on the prow they found him looking forth,  
As from a crag o'er-hanging grassy lands  
Where home-bred cattle graze, the lion glares  
A-hungered; and, behind, as meaner beasts  
That wait the lion's onset for their share,  
Outlaw'd and reprobate of many a land,  
The ravening crew. Beside him, right and left,  
Stood Lomna, Ferragon, and Fergobar;  
Which Lomna in the closure of his cloak  
Wore a gold brooch embossed with flashing gems 160  
Choicest by far of all their spoils yet won:  
And Ingcel thus demanded of the spies—

“ What saw ye, say ? ”

“ A chariot-cavalcade

“ Along Street Cualann moving from the North.

“ Splendid the show of lofty-pacing steeds

“ And glittering war-cars : chariots seventeen

“ Were counted. In the first were reverend men,

“ Poets, belike, or judges. After these

“ Heralds, it seem’d, or high apparitors

“ That give the world to know a great one comes.

170

“ He in the third car rode ; an aged man,

“ Full-gray, majestical, of face serene,

“ Followed by household numerous and strong,

“ Cooks, butlers, door-wards, cup-bearers and grooms.”

“ What heard ye ? ”

“ From a vast hall’s open doors

“ The stroke of steel on flint, at kindling fire ;

“ And every stroke so sounded as the arm

“ That gave it were a giant’s, and every shower

“ Of sparks it shed—as if a summer sky

“ Lightened at eve—illumed the dusk around.”

180

“ What this, good Ferragon, who best of all

“ Knowest Erin hill and valley, things and men ? ”

Said Ingcel. Ferragon made answer slow,

(For, first, his soul said this within himself,

“ Oh, royal brother, that it be not thou ! ”)—

“ I know not what may be this open hall

“ With fire at hand unless, belike, it be

“ Da-Derga’s guest-house, which, for all who come

“ By Cualann Street, stands open, wherein still

“ Firewood stands stack’d and brazen cauldron hangs

190

“ Slung ready, and clear water running through ;

“ Bruidin-Da-Derga.”

“ And the man who strikes

“ The flint and steel to kindle fire therein ? ”

“I know not if it be not that he be  
 “Some king’s fore-runner, sent before a king  
 “To kindle fire ere yet the king himself  
 “And royal household reach their resting-place.”  
 “And he who in the thirdmost chariot rode,  
 “He who is grey, serene, majestical ?”

“I know not if it be not that he be 200  
 “Some king of Erin’s sub-kings who, to-night,  
 “Rests in Da-Derga’s hospitable hall.”

“Up sail ! To shore !” cried Ingcel ; and the fleet,  
 As flight of wild-geese startled from a fen,  
 Displayed their wings of white, and made the land.

‘Twas at Troy Furveen, and the sun was down ;  
 But, from Da-Derga’s hall so streamed the light,  
 It shone at distance as a ruddy star ;  
 And thitherward the host o’er moor and fell  
 Marched straight : but when behind a sheltering knoll 210  
 Hard by, but still concealed, the ranks were drawn,  
 “Make now our Carn,” said Ingcel, and the host  
 Defiling past him, cast, each man, his stone  
 All in one heap.

“When this night’s work is done,”  
 Said Ingcel, “he who shall return alive  
 “Shall take his stone again. Who not returns,  
 “His stone shall here remain his monument.  
 “And now, before we make the trial of who  
 “Returns, and who stays yonder, let us send  
 “Scout Milscoth—for he bears the boast of sight 220  
 “And far-off hearing far above us all—  
 “To spy the house and bring us speedy word  
 “Of all he sees and hears, outside and in :  
 “So shall we judge how best to win the same.”

Forth went the spy : they waited by their Carn,  
 Till, gliding as a shadow, he returned :  
 And round him, as he came, they drew a ring,

Round him and Ingcel and Don Dessa's sons,  
And round their destined stores of memory.

“What sawest thou outward ?”

“Outward of the house 230

“I saw, drawn up at every guarded door,  
“Full seventeen chariots ; and, between the spokes,  
“Spying, I saw, to rings of iron tied,  
“At end and side wall, thrice a hundred steeds  
“Groom'd sleek, ear-active, eating corn and hay.”

“What means this concourse, think'st thou, Ferragon ?”

“I know not if it be not that a host  
“Resorting, it may be, to games or fair  
“At Tara or at Taltin, rest to-night  
“In the great guest-house. ‘Twill be heavier cost 240  
“Of blows and blood to win it than it seen'd.”  
“A guest-house, whether many within or few,  
“Is as the travellers' temple, and esteemed  
“In every civil land a sanctuary.  
“‘Twere woe to sack the inn,” said Lomna Druth.  
“Lomna,” said Ingcel, “when we swore our oaths  
“We made not reservation of the inn :  
“And, for their numbers, fear not, Ferragon ;  
“The more, the more the spoil. Say on, and tell  
“What heard'st thou ?”

“Through the open doors I heard 250

“A hum as of a crowd of feasting men.  
“Princeely the murmur, as when voices strong  
“Of far-heard captains on the front of war  
“Sink low and sweet in company of queens.”  
“What think'st thou, Ferragon ?”

“The gentlest speech

“Within doors gives the loudest cheer afield.  
“Methinks to spoil this house will try our strength.”

“And it shall try it : and our strength shall bear  
 “That and worse trial. Say, what sawest thou next  
 “Within the house ? Begin from the right hand.” 260

“To rightward of the great door in the midst  
 “A bench I saw : ten warriors sat thereon.  
 “The captain of the ten was thus. His brow  
 “Thick and high arching o'er a gray clear eye :  
 “A face long-oval, broader-boned above :  
 “A man whose look bespoke adventure past  
 “And days of danger welcome yet to come,  
 “Though sadden'd somewhat, haply by remorse  
 “For blood ill-spilt or broken vows or both.  
 “His mantle green, his brooch and sword-hilt gold.’ 270

“What captain this, conceiv'st thou, Ferragon ?”  
 “I know him ; verily a man of might ;  
 “A man of name renown'd in field and hall ;  
 “Cormac Condlongas, long the banish'd son  
 “Of Conor son of Nessa. When his sire  
 “Through love of Deirdre broke his guarantees  
 “Pledged to his step-sire, Fergus son of Roy,  
 “For Usnach's sons' safe-conduct, Cormac, he,  
 “Through love of Fergus and through stronger love  
 “Of kingly-plighted honour undefiled, 280

“Abjured his father's councils and his court,  
 “And in the hostile halls of western Maeve  
 “Spent many a year of heart-corroding care,  
 “And many a man of Ulster, many a man  
 “Of his own kin, in alien service, slew.  
 “If he be there, methinks to-night's assault  
 “Will leave the stones of some here unremoved.”

Said Ingcel, “I shall know him, when I see  
 “That pale remorseful visage by and by,  
 “And that same brooch and sword-hilt shall be mine. 290

“What of the nine ?”

“The nine he sat among  
 “Were men of steadfast looks, that at his word,

"So seemed it me, would stay not to enquire  
 "Whose kindred were they he might bid them slay."

"Knowest thou, oh friend, the serviceable nine?"

"I know them also," answered Ferragon.

"Of them 'tis said they never slew a man

"For evil deed, and never spared a man

"For good deed; but, as ordered, duteous, slew

"Or slew not. Shun that nine, unless your heads 300

"Be cased in casquets made of adamant;

"Else shall the corpse of many a valiant man

"Now present, on Da-Derga's threshold lie."

"Nine for his nine!" said Ingcel. "Think not thou

"By tongue-drawn dangers and deterrent phrase

"Exaggerate, to shake my settled soul

"From that which is my right. Say on: what next?"

"A bench of three: thick-hair'd, and equal-long

• The hair on poll and brow. Black cloaks they wore,

"Black their sword-sheaths, their hafted lances black; 310

"Fair men, withal, themselves, and ruddy-brown."

"Who these, oh Ferragon?"

"I know not, I,

"Unless, it may be, these be of the Picts

"Exiled from Alba, who in Conor's house

"Have shelter; and, if these indeed be they,

"Three better out of Alba never came

"Or sturdier to withstand the brunt of blows."

"Blows they shall have," said Ingcel; "and their home,

"Rid of their presence well, shall not again

"Have need to doom them to a new exile. 320

"What further sawest thou?"

"On the bench beside

"I saw three slender, three face-shaven men,

"Robed in red mantles and with caps of red.

"No swords had they, nor bore they spear or shield,

"But each man on his knee a bagpipe held

“With jewelled chanter flashing as he moved,  
“And mouth-piece ready to supply the wind.”  
“What pipers these?”

“These pipers of a truth

“If so be it that I mistake them not,  
“Appear not often in men’s halls of glee : 330

“Men of the *Sidhs* they are ; and I have heard  
“When strife fell out in Tara Luachra’s hall  
“Around Cuchullin and the butchering bands  
“Of treacherous Maeve and Ailill, they were there.”

“To-night their pipes shall play us to our ships  
“With strains of triumph ; or their fingers’ ends  
“Shall never close the stops of music more.”

So Ingcel ; but again said Ferragon,  
“Men of the *Sidhs* they are : to strike at them

“Is striking at a shadow. If ’tis they, 340  
“Shun this assault ; for I have also heard  
“At the first tuning of these elvish pipes  
“Nor crow nor cormorant round all the coasts  
“But hastens to partake the flesh of men.”

“Flesh ye shall have, of Ingcel’s enemies,  
“All fowl that hither flap the wing to-night !  
“And music too at table, as it seems.  
“What further sawest thou ?”

“On a broader bench

“Three vast-proportioned warriors, by whose side  
“The slender pipers showed as small as wrens. 350  
“In their first greyness they ; grey-dark their robes,  
“Grey-dark their swords enormous, of an edge  
“To slice the hair on water. He who sits  
“The midmost of the three, grasps with both hands  
“A spear of fifty rivets, and so sways  
“And swings the weapon as a man might think  
“The very thing had life, and struggled strong  
“To dash itself at breasts of enemies :

“A cauldron at his feet, big as the vat  
 “Of a king’s kitchen ; in that vat a pool, 360  
 “Hideous to look upon, of liquor black :  
 “Therein he dips and cools the blade by times.”

“Resolve us who be these three, Ferragon.”

“Not hard to tell ; though hard, perchance, to hear  
 “For those who listen, and who now must know  
 “What foes their fortune dooms them cope withal,  
 “If this assault be given while these be here.  
 “These threc are Sencha son of Olioll,  
 “Called ‘Half-the-battle’ by admiring men ;  
 “Duftach, for fierceness named the Addercop ; 370  
 “And Govnan son of Luignech ; and the spear  
 “In hands of Duftach is the famous ‘*lann*’  
 “Of Keltar son of Utechar, which erst  
 “A wizard of the Tuath De Danaan brought  
 “To battle at Moy Tury, and there lost :  
 “Found after. And these motions of the spear,  
 “And sudden sallies hard to be restrained,  
 “Affect it, oft as blood of enemies  
 “Is ripe for spilling ; and a cauldron then  
 “Full of witch-brewage needs must be at hand, 380  
 “To quench it, when the homicidal act  
 “Is by its blade expected ; quench it not,  
 “It blazes up, even in the holder’s hand,  
 “And through the holder, and the door-planks through,  
 “Flies forth to sate itself in massacre.  
 “Ours is the massacre it now would make :  
 “Our blood it maddens for : sirs, have a care  
 “How ye assault where champions such as these  
 “Armed with the *lann* of Keltar, wait within.”

“I have a certain blade,” said Ingcel, “here ; 390  
 “Steel’d by Smith Wayland in a Lochlann cave,  
 “Whose temper has not failed me ; and I mean  
 “To cut the foul head off this Addercop,

“And snap his gadding spear across my knee.  
 “Go on, and say what more thou sawest within.”

“A single warrior on a separate bench  
 “I saw. Methinks no man was ever born  
 “So stately-built, so perfect of his limbs.  
 “So hero-like as he. Fair-haired he is  
 “And yellow-bearded, with an eye of blue. 400  
 “He sits apart and wears a wistful look,  
 “As if he missed some friend’s companionship.”

Then Ferragon, not waiting question, cried,  
 “Gods ! all the foremost, all the valiantest  
 “Of Erin’s champions, gathered in one place  
 “For our destruction, are assembled here !  
 “That man is Conall Carnach ; and the friend  
 “He looks for vainly with a wistful eye  
 “Is great Cuchullin : he no more shall share  
 “The upper bench with Conall ; since the tomb 410  
 “Holds him, by hand of Conall well avenged.  
 “The foremost this, the mightiest champion this  
 “Left of the Red Branch, since Cuchullin’s fall.  
 “Look you, as thick as fragments are of ice  
 “When one night’s frost is crackled underfoot,  
 “As thick as autumn leaves, as blades of grass,  
 “Shall the lopp’d members and the cleven half-heads  
 “Of them that hear me, be, by break of day,  
 “Before Da-Derga’s doors, if this assault  
 “Be given, while Conall Carnach waits within !” 420

“Pity to slay that man,” said Lomna Druth.  
 “That is the man who, matched at fords of Clane,  
 “With maimed Mesgedra, though no third was near,  
 “Tied up his own right hand, to fight him fair.  
 “A man both mild and valiant, frank and wise,  
 “A friend of men of music and of song,  
 “Loved of all women : were there only one  
 “Such hero in the house, for that one’s sake  
 “Forego this slaughter !”

“Lomna,” Ingeel said,  
 “Not without reason do men call thee fool ; 430  
 “And, Ferragon, think not that fear of man  
 “The bravest ever born on Irish soil  
 “Shall make its shameful entrance in the breast  
 “Of one of all who hear us. Spy, say on,  
 “What further sawest thou ?”

“Three brave youths I saw ;  
 “Three brothers, as I judge. Their mantles wide  
 “Were all of Syrian silk ; and needle-work  
 “Of gold on every hem. With ivory combs  
 “They smoothed the shining ridges of their hair  
 “That spread and rippled to their shoulder-tips, 440  
 “And moved with every motion of their brows.  
 “A slender, tender boy beside them slept,  
 “His head in one attendant’s lap, his feet  
 “In lap of other one ; and, couched beside,  
 “A hound I saw, and heard him ‘Ossar’ called.”  
 “Whose be these Syrian silks shall soon be mine,  
 “Oh Ferragon ? and wherefore weep’st thou, say ?”  
 “Alas, too well I know them ; and I weep  
 “To think that where they are, he must be near  
 “Their father, Conary, himself, the king : 450  
 “And woe it is that he whose infant lips  
 “Suck’d the same breast as ours, should now be there !”  
 “What, Conary, the arch-king of the realm  
 “Of Erin here ? Say, sawest thou there a King ?”  
 “I know not if a king ; but one I saw  
 “Seated apart : before his couch there hung  
 “A silver broidered curtain : grey he was,  
 “Of aspect mild, benevolent, composed.  
 “A cloak he wore of colour like the haze  
 “Of a May morning when the sun shines warm 460  
 “On dewy meads and fresh-ploughed tillage land,  
 “Variously beautiful, with border broad

“Of golden woof that glittered to his knee  
 “A stream of light. Before him on the floor  
 “A juggler played his feats: nine balls he had,  
 “And flung them upward, eight in air at once,  
 “And one in hand: like swarm of summer bees  
 “They danced and circled, till his eye net mine;  
 “Then he could catch no more; but down they fell  
 “And rolled upon the floor. ‘An evil eye’      470  
 “‘Has seen me,’ said the juggler; and the child  
 “Who slept beside, awoke, and cried aloud,  
 “‘Ossar! good dog, hie forth and chase the thieves!’  
 “Then judged I longer to remain were ill,  
 “But, ere I left, discharged a rapid glance  
 “Around the house, beholding many a band  
 “Of able guardsmen corsleted and helm’d,  
 “Of captains, carriers, farriers, charioteers,  
 “Horseboys and laqueys, all in order set,  
 “All good men of their hands, and weapon’d well.”      480

“Said Ferragon, “If my advice were given,  
 “Twould be to leave this onset unessay’d.”

“Pity to slay this king,” said Lomna Druth:  
 “Since he has reigned there has not fallen a year  
 “Of dearth, or plague, or murrain on the land:  
 “The dew has never left the blade of grass  
 “One day of Conary’s time, before the noon;  
 “Nor harsh wind ruffled hair upon the side  
 “Of grazing beast. Since he began his reign  
 “From mid-spring to mid-autumn cloud nor storm      490  
 “Has dimm’d the daily-shining, bounteous sun;  
 “But each good year has seen its harvests three,  
 “Of blade, of ear, of fruit, apple and nut.  
 “Peace until now in all his realm has reigned,  
 “And terror of just laws kept men secure.  
 “What though, by love constrained, in passion’s hour,  
 “I joined my fortunes to the desperate fates

“Of hapless kinsmen, I repent it now,  
 “And wish that rigorous law had had its course  
 “Sooner than this good king should now be slain.” 500

“Not spoken like a brother,” Ingcel said,  
 “Nor one who feels for brothers by the side  
 “Of a grey father butchered, as I feel.”

“Twas blind chance-medley, and we knew them not  
 “For kin of thine,” said Ferragon ; “but he,  
 “This king, is kin of ours ; and that thou knowest  
 “With seasonable warning : it were woe  
 “To slay him.”

“Woe it were, perchance, to thee ;  
 “To me, 'twere joy to slay both him and them ;  
 “T'were blood for blood, and what my soul desires. 510  
 “My father was a king : my brethren seven  
 “Were princely nurtured. Think'st thou I for them  
 “Feel not compassion ? nourish not desire  
 “Of vengeance ? No. I stand upon the oaths  
 “Ye swore me ; I demand my spoil for spoil,  
 “My blood for blood.”

“Tis just,” said Fergobar,  
 “We promised and will make the bargain good.”

“Yet take the spoil we own to be thy right  
 “Elsewhere,” said Ferragon ; “not here nor now.  
 “We gave thee license, and we grant it still, 520  
 “To take a plunder : look around and choose  
 “What trading port, what dealers' burgh ye will—  
 “We give it, and will help you to the gain.”

“We gave thee licence,” Lomna said,—“and I  
 “Grieve that we gave it, yea, or took the like,—  
 “To take a plunder ; but we gave thee not  
 “Licence to take the life, the soul itself  
 “Of our whole nation, as you now would do.  
 “For, slay our reverend sages of the law,

"Slay him who puts the law they teach in act ; 530  
 "Slay our sweet poets, and our sacred bards,  
 "Who keep the continuity of time  
 "By fame perpetual of renownéd deeds ;  
 "Slay our experienced captains who prepare  
 "The youth for martial manhood, and the charge  
 "Of public freedom, as befits a state  
 "Self-governed, self-sufficing, self-contained ;  
 "Slay all that minister our loftier life,  
 "Now by this evil chance assembled here,  
 "You leave us but the carcass of a state, 540  
 "A rabble ripe to rot, and yield the land  
 "To foreign masters and perpetual shame."

Said Ingcel, "This night's plunder is my own,  
 "And paid for. I shall take it here and now.  
 "I heed not Lomna's airy rhetoric ;  
 "But this I say, and mark it, Ferragon :  
 "Let him who would turn craven, if he will,  
 "Take up his stone and go : and take withal  
 "Contempt of valiant men."

Said Lomna Druth,

"He is no craven, Ingcel ; nor am I. 550  
 "His heart misgives him, not because he fears  
 "To match himself in manlyfeat of arms  
 "With any champion, but because he fears  
 "To do an impious act, as I too fear."

"I own it true," said Ferragon, "my heart  
 "Is full of anguish and remorseful love  
 "Towards him, my sovereign, who did never wrong,  
 "Save in not meting justice to the full,  
 "Against these violators of his law,  
 "Who now repay his clemency with death." 560

"Call it not clemency," said Fergobar :  
 "He drove us naked from ancestral homes  
 "To herd with outlaws and with desperate men."

“Outlaws we are ; and so far desperate,”  
 Said Ingcel, “that we mean to sack this house,  
 “And for the very reason that he says,  
 “Because the richest jewels, both of men  
 “And gold, the land affords, are gathered there.”

Then Lomna from his mantle took the brooch,  
 And said “Oh Ingcel, this and whatso else 570  
 “Of other plunder fallen to my share  
 “Lies in the ships, I offer. Take it all,  
 “But leave this house unsack’d.”

Said Ferragon,  
 “Take also all my share ; but spare the king.”

But Ingcel roughly pushed the brooch away,  
 And said “Have done. The onset shall be given.”

“The onset shall be given, unless the earth  
 “Open and swallow us !” said Fergobar.

“The onset shall be given, unless the heavens  
 “Fall solid on us !” answered Ger and Gel. 580

“The onset shall be given !” replied they all.

Then Lomna,—laying his brooch upon the heap,—  
 “Who first returns—but I shall not return—  
 “To take his stone again, take also this ;  
 “And, for the rest of what my sword has gained,  
 “Share it among you. I forgive you all,  
 “And bid you all farewell ; for nothing now  
 “Remains for me but death :” and with the word  
 He struck his dagger in his heart, and fell.

“Kings, lords, and men of war,” said Ferragon, 590  
 “Comrades till now, the man whose body lies  
 “Before us, though we used to call him fool  
 “Because his heart was softer and his speech  
 “More delicate than ours, I now esteem  
 “Both wise and brave, and noble in his death.

"He spoke me truly, for he knew my heart  
 "Unspoken, when he said 'twas not through fear  
 "Of death I spoke dissuading ; but through fear  
 "Of conscience : but your hearts I better knew  
 "Leaving unspoken what was in my own ; 600  
 "For well indeed I knew how vain it were  
 "To talk of pity, love, or tenderness  
 "To bloody-minded and to desperate men.  
 "Therefore I told you, and I told you true,  
 "What loss to reckon of your wretched lives,  
 "Entering this dragons' den ; but did not tell  
 "The horror and the anguish sharp as death  
 "In my own bosom entering as I knew  
 "The pictured presence of each faithful friend,  
 "And of that sire revered, ye now consign 610  
 "To massacre and bloody butchery.  
 "And that 'twas love that swayed me, and not fear,  
 "Take this for proof :" and drew and slew himself.  
 "Comrades and valiant partners," Ingcel cried,  
 "Stand not nor pause to wonder or lament  
 "These scrupulous companions ; rest them well !  
 "But set your spirits to achieve the end  
 "That brought us hither. Now that they are gone  
 "And nothing hinders, are we all agreed  
 "To give this onset bravely and at once ?" 620

"I speak for all," said Fergobar. "Agreed !  
 "Ready we are and willing, and I myself,  
 "Having my proper vows of vengeance,  
 "Will lead you, and be foremost of you all."

They raised the shout of onset : from his seat  
 Leaped Cecht, leaped Cormac, Conall Carnach leaped,  
 And Duftach from the cauldron drew his spear ;  
 But Conary with countenance serene  
 Sat on unmoved. "We are enough," he said,  
 "To hold the house, though thrice our number came ; 630

“ And little think they, whosoe'er they are,  
 “ (Grant, gracious ones of Heaven, it be not they !)  
 “ That such a welcome waits them at the hands  
 “ Of Erin’s choicest champions. Door-keepers,  
 “ Stand to your posts, and strike who enters down ! ”

The shout came louder, and at every door  
 At once all round the house, the shock began  
 Of charging hosts and battery of blows ;  
 And through the door that fronted Conary’s seat  
 A man burst headlong, reeling, full of wounds,  
 But dropped midway, smote by the club of Cecht. 640

“ What, thou ? oh Fergobar ! ” cried Conary ;  
 “ Say, ere thou diest, that thou art alone—  
 “ That Ferragon and Lomna whom I love  
 “ Are not among you.”

“ King,” said Fergobar,  
 “ I die without the vengeance that I vowed.  
 “ Thou never lovedst me : but the love thou gavest  
 “ My hapless brothers, well have they returned,  
 “ And both lie outside, slain by their own hands  
 “ Rather than join in this just cause with me.” 650

“ The gods between us judge,” said Conary.  
 “ Cast not his body forth. I loved him once,  
 “ And burial he shall have, when, by and by,  
 “ These comrades of his desperate attempt  
 “ Are chased away.”

But swiftly answered Cecht,  
 “ King, they bring fire without : and, see, the stream  
 “ Runs dry before our feet, damn’d off above.”  
 “ Then, truly, lords,” said Conary, “ we may deign  
 “ To put our swords to much unworthy use.  
 “ Cormac Condlongas, take a troop with thee,  
 “ And chase them from the house ; and, strangers, ye 660

“ Who rode before me without licence asked,  
 “ I see ye be musicians ; take your pipes  
 “ And sound a royal pibroch, one of you,  
 “ Before the chief.”

“ Yea, mighty king,” said one,  
 “ The strain I play ye shall remember long,”  
 And put the mouthpiece to his lips. • At once—  
 It seemed as earth and sky were sound alone,  
 And every sound a maddening battle-call,  
 So spread desire of fight through breast and brain,      670  
 And every arm tofeat of combat strung.  
 Forth went the sallying hosts : the hosts within  
 Heard the enlarging tumult from their doors  
 Roll outward ; and the clash and clamour heard  
 Of falling foes before ; and, over it,  
 The yelling pibroch ; but, anon, the din  
 Grew distant and more distant ; and they heard  
 Instead, at every door new onset loud,  
 And cry of “ Fire ! ” “ Bring fire ! ”

“ Behoves us make

“ A champion-circuit of the house at large,”      680  
 Said Conary. “ Thou, Duftach, who, I see,  
 “ Can’st hardly keep the weapon in thy hand  
 “ From flying on these caitiffs of itself,  
 “ Lead thou, and take two cohorts of the guard,  
 “ And let another piper play you on.”

“ I fear them, these red pipers,” said the boy.

“ Peace, little Ferflath, thou art but a child,”  
 Said Duftach. “ Come, companions (—patience, spear !—)  
 “ Blow up the pibroch ; warriors, follow me ! ”

And forth they went, and with them rushed amain      690  
 Senchad and Govnan and the thick-hair’d three  
 Of Pictland with a shout ; and all who heard  
 Deenied that the spear of Keltar shouted too  
 The loudest and the fiercest of them all.  
 So issued Duftach’s band : the hosts within

Heard the commotion and the hurtling rout  
 Half round the house, and heard the mingling scream  
 Of pipes and death-cries far into the night :  
 But distant and more distant grew the din,  
 And Duftach came not back ; but thronging back      700  
 Came the assailants, and at every door  
 Joined simultaneous battle once again.  
 Then Conall Carnach, who, at door and door,  
 Swift as a shuttle from a weaver's hand,  
 Divided help, cried,

“ King, our friends are lost  
 “ Unless another sally succour them ! ”

“ Take then thy troop,” said Conary ; “ and thou  
 “ Red-capp'd companion, see thou play a strain  
 “ So loud our comrades straying in the dark  
 “ May hear, and join you.”

“ Evil pipes are theirs      710  
 “ Trust not these pipers. I am but a child,”  
 Said Ferflath ; “ but I know they are not men  
 “ Of mankind, and will pipe you all to harm.”

“ Peace, little prince,” said Conall. “ Trust in me :  
 “ I shall but make one circuit of the house,  
 “ And presently be with thee ; come, my men,  
 “ Give me the *Bricriu Conaill*, and my spear,  
 “ And sound Cuchullin's onset for the breach.”

And issuing, as a jet of smoke and flame  
 Bursts from a fresh-replenished furnace-mouth,      720  
 He and his cohort sallied : they within  
 Heard the concussion and the spreading shock  
 Through thick opposing legions overthrown,  
 As, under hatches, men on shipboard hear  
 The dashing and the tumbling waves without,  
 Half round the house : no more : clamour and scream  
 Grew fainter in the distance ; and the hosts  
 Gazed on each other with misgiving eyes,  
 And reckoned who were left : alack, but few !

“Gods ! can it be,” said Conary, “that my chiefs  
Desert me in this peril !”

“King,” said Cecht,  
“Escape who will, we here desert thee not.”

“Oh, never will I think that Conall fled,”  
Said Ferflath. “He is brave and kind and true,  
“And promised me he would return again.  
“It is these wicked sprites of fairy-land  
“Who have beguiled the chiefs away from us.”

“Alack,” the druid cried ; “he speaks the truth :  
“He has the seer’s insight which the gods  
“Vouchsafe to eyes of childhood. We are lost ;  
“And for thy fault, oh Conary, the gods  
“Have given us over to the spirits who dwell  
“Beneath the earth.”

“Deserted I may be,  
“Not yet disheartened, nor debased in soul,”  
Said Conary. “My sons are with me still,  
“And thou, my faithful sidesman, and you all  
“Companions and partakers of my days  
“Of glory, and of power munificent.  
“I pray the gods forgiveness if in aught,  
“Weighty or trifling, I have done amiss ;  
“But here I stand, and will defend my life,  
“Let come against me power of earth or hell,  
“All but the gods themselves, the righteous ones,  
“Whom I revere.”

“My king,” said Cecht, “the knaves  
“Swarm thick as gnats at every door again,  
“Behoves us make a circuit, for ourselves,  
“Around the house ; for so our fortune stands  
“That we have left us nothing else to choose  
“But, out of doors, to beat them off, or burn  
“Within doors : for they fire the house anew.”

Then uprose kingly Conary himself  
 And put his helmet on his sacred head,  
 And took his good sharp weapon in his hand,  
 And braced himself for battle long disused.  
 Uprose his three good sons, and doff'd their cloaks  
 Of Syrian purple, and assumed their arms  
 Courageously and princely, and uprose  
 Huge Cecht at left-hand of the king, and held  
 His buckler broad in front. From every side,  
 Thinn'd though they were, guardsman and charioteer, 770  
 Steward and butler, cupbearer and groom,  
 Thronged into martial file, and forth they went  
 Right valiantly and royally. The band  
 They left behind them, drawing freer breath,—  
 As sheltering shepherds in a cave who hear  
 The rattle and the crash of circling thunder,—  
 Heard the king's onset and his hearty cheer,  
 The tumult, and the sounding strokes of Cecht,  
 Three times go round the house, and every time  
 Through overthrow of galling enemies, 780  
 And all exulted in the kindling hope  
 Of victory and rescue, till again  
 The sallying host returned : all hot they were ;  
 And Conary in the doorway entering last  
 Exclaimed, “A drink, a drink !” and cast himself  
 Panting upon his couch.

“ Ye cupbearers,”  
 Cried Cecht, “ be nimble : fetch the king a drink :  
 “ Well has he earned this thirst.” The cupbearers  
 Ran hither, thither ; every vat they tried,  
 And every vessel—timber, silver, gold,— 790  
 But drink was nowhere found, nor wine nor ale  
 Nor water. “ All has gone to quench the fire.  
 “ There is not left of liquor in the house  
 “ One drop ; nor runs there water, since the stream  
 “ Was damm'd and turned aside by Ingcel's men,

“ Nearer than Tiprad-Casra ; and the way  
 “ Thither is long and rugged, and the foe  
 “ Swarms thick between.”

“ Who now among you here  
 “ Will issue forth, and fetch your king a drink ? ”  
 Said Cecht. One answered,

“ Wherefore not thyself ? ” 800  
 “ My place is here,” said Cecht, “ by my king’s side :  
 “ His sidesman I.”

“ Good papa Cecht, a drink,  
 “ A drink, or I am sped ! ” cried Conary.

“ Nay then,” said Cecht, “ it never shall be said  
 “ My royal master craved a drink in vain,  
 “ And water in a well, and life in me.  
 “ Swear ye to stand around him while ye live,  
 “ And I with but his goblet in one hand,  
 “ And this good weapon in the other, will forth  
 “ And fetch him drink,—alone, or say, with whom ? ” 810

None answered but the little Ferflath ; he  
 Cried, “ Take me with thee, papa Cecht, take me ! ”

Then Cecht took up the boy and set him high  
 On his left shoulder with the golden cup  
 Of Conary in his hand ; he raised his shield  
 High up for the protection of the child,  
 And, forth the great door, as a loosened rock  
 (Fly ye, foes all, fly ye before the face  
 Of Cecht, the battle-sidesman of the king !)  
 That from a hill side shoots into a brake, 820  
 Went through and through them with a hunter’s bound ;  
 And with another, and another, reached  
 The outer rim of darkness, past their ken.  
 Then down he set the lad, and hand in hand,  
 They ran together till they reached the well  
 And filled the cup.

"My little son, stay here  
 Said Cecht, "and I will carry, if I may,  
 "His drink to Conary."

"O, papa Cecht,  
 "Leave me not here," said Ferflath; "I shall run  
 "Beside thee, and shall follow in the lane  
 "Thou'l make me through them." 830

"Come then," answered Cecht,  
 "Bear thou the cup, and see it spill not: come!"

But ere they ran a spear-throw, Ferflath cried  
 "Ah me, I've stumbled, and the water's spilt."

"Alas! said Cecht, "re-fill, and let me bear."  
 But ere they ran another spear-throw, Cecht  
 Cried "Woe is me; this ground is all too rough  
 "For hope that, running, we shall ever effect  
 "Our errand; and the time is deadly short."

Again they filled the cup, and through the dawn 840  
 Slow breaking, with impatient careful steps  
 Held back their course, Cecht in his troubled mind  
 Revolving how the child might bear his charge  
 Behind him, when *his* turn should come for use  
 Of both his hands to clear and keep that lane;  
 When, in the faint light of the glowing dawn,  
 Casting his eyes to seaward, lo, the fleet  
 Of Ingcel had set sail; and, gazing next  
 Up the dim slope before him, on the ridge  
 Between him and Da-Derga's mansion, saw 850  
 Rise into view a chariot-cavalcade  
 And Conall Carnach in the foremost car.  
 Behind him Cormac son of Conor came  
 And Duftach bearing now a drooping spear,  
 At head of all their sallying armament.  
 Wild, pale, and shame-faced were the looks of all,  
 As men who doubted did they dream or wake.

Or were they honest to be judged, or base.

“Cecht, we are late,” said Conall, “we and thou.  
“He needs no more of drink who rides within.”

860

“Is the king here ?”

“ ‘Tis here that was the king.

“We found him smothered under heaps of slain  
“In middle flor.”

“Thou, Ferflath, take the cup

“And hold it to thy father’s lips,” said Cecht.

The child approached the cup ; the dying king  
Felt the soft touch and smiled, and drew a sigh ;  
And, as they raised him in the chariot, died.

“A gentle and a generous king is gone,”

Said Cecht, and wept. “I take to witness all

“Here present, that I did not leave his side

870

“But by his own command. But how came ye,

“Choice men and champions of the warlike North,

“Tutors of old and samplars to our youth

“In loyalty and duty, how came ye

“To leave your lawful king alone to die ?”

“Cecht,” answered Conall, “and thou Ferflath, know,—

“For these be things concern both old and young—

“We live not of ourselves. The heavenly Gods

“Who give to every man his share of iife

“Here in this sphere of objects visible

880

“And things prehensible by hands of men,

“Though good and just they are, are not themselves

“The only unseen beings of the world.

“Spirits there are around us in the air

“And elfish creatures of the earth, now seen,

“Now vanishing from sight ; and we of these

“(But whether with, or whether without the will

“Of the just Gods I know not) have to-night

“By strong enchantments and prevailing spells,—

“Though mean the agents and contemptible,— 890  
 “Been fooled and baffled in a darkling maze  
 “And kept abroad despite our better selves,  
 “From succour of our king. We were enough  
 “To have brushed them off as flies : and while we made  
 “Our sallies through ‘hem, bursting from the doors,  
 “We quelled them flat : but when these wicked sprites,—  
 “For now I know, men of the *Sidhs* they were—  
 “Who played their pipes before us, led us on  
 “Into the outer margin of the night,  
 “No man amongst us all could stay himself 900  
 “Or keep from following ; and they kept us there,  
 “As men who walk asleep, in drowsy trance  
 “Listening a sweet pernicious melody,  
 “And following after in an idle round  
 “Till all was finished, and the plunderers gone.  
 “Haply they hear me, and the words I speak  
 “May bring their malice also upon me  
 “As late it fell on Conary. Yet, now  
 “The spell is off me, and I see the sun,  
 “By all my nation’s swearing-Gods I swear 910  
 “I do defy them ; and appeal to you  
 “Beings of goodness perfect, and to Thee  
 “Great unknown Being who hadst made them all,  
 “Take ye compassion on the race of men ;  
 “And, for this slavery of *gaysh* and *sidh*  
 “Send down some emanation of yourselves  
 “To rule and comfort us ! And I have heard  
 “There come the tidings yet may make us glad  
 “Of such a one new born, or soon to be.  
 “Now, mount beside me, that with solemn rites 920  
 “We give the king, at Tara, burial.”

## NOTES.

### I. THE EVE OF ST. AGNES.

70, 71. "All amort" seems to have been originally a corruption of the French *à la mort*, but here it clearly means "dead to everything" except the thought of St. Agnes. The lamb (Lat. *agnus*) was associated with the saint, and on her day the nuns used to dedicate two lambs at the altar, while the Agnus Dei was being sung; they were shorn in due course, and the wool used by the nuns for making holy garments. See line 117.

120. *i.e.* You must have the protection of magical power. This carrying of water in a sieve was a stock accomplishment of witches.

171. Merlin, the famous enchanter, associated with King Arthur, was eventually bound by one of his own spells. As we "pay the debt of nature" when we die, so is Merlin described here as paying the "monstrous debt" to the demon from whom his power came. There was a terrible tempest the night after he was spell-bound.

173, 175. In the original draft of the poem a stanza stood between vi. and vii., showing that a feast and music were parts of the expected vision.

180. *i.e.* May I never share in the Resurrection of the Dead.

238. Her soul is said to have been driven away by weariness, according to the fancy—common to poets and savages—that the soul is really absent from the body during sleep.

266. Keats uses the adjective "sooth" three times—of sleep, of a voice, and in this line. It is usually supposed to mean "sweet," but there is certainly an added suggestion of smoothness and soothing in it.

### III. SOHRAB AND RUSTUM.

42. Ader-baijan is that province of North-west Persia (capital Tabriz) in which Russian influence recently became predominant on the collapse of the Persian government.

82. Seistan is in Eastern Persia, within the British sphere of influence.

120. This intoxicating drink is known as kovmiss.

132. Kuzzaks=Cossacks.

452. Sirius, the dog-star, associated with the unhealthy hot season.

502. Sir Walter Scott once heard a horse, in a moment of agony, utter a thrilling scream, which he considers the most melancholy sound he ever heard.

736. There are weeping horses in the *Iliad*, the *Aeneid*, and Hindu legend. Suetonius tells how horses wept before Julius Caesar's death, and there is a touching tale of an old white horse coming with tears to Saint Columba just before the saint's death.

861. Jemshid was a great legendary builder, of Persian history: cf. *Omar Khayyám*, xviii. :

They say the lion and the lizard keep  
The courts where Jamshid gloried and drank deep.

#### IV. ATALANTA'S RACE.

363. *Murk*, the husks or chaff of fruit from which the juice has been pressed (*English Dialect Dictionary*).

#### V. CONARY.

15. Alba was the ancient name of Scotland, as Scotia was of Ireland.

30. Thomond is the district now included in Clare and Limerick.

31. Tara, near Navan in Co Meath, was the residence of the supreme Kings of Ireland from the earliest times to the sixth century, when it was deserted.

37. A *gaysh* was something forbidden, what we now call a taboo. The King of Ireland, as of other communities, was bound by a number of these taboos, whose irrational character betrays their ancient religious origin.

40. This seems to be a druidical way of saying "all the year round," for Beltane day was (and still is in Scotland) itself May-day.

51. These were two of the five great roads which radiated from Tara.

97. Emain was the capital of Ulster. Its name is preserved in Navan fort near Armagh, where there are earthworks covering eleven acres.

110. There was an old Hindu taboo against "the sight of a

female beggar with dishevelled hair, dressed in red, and preceding the vanguard."

150. Ben-Edar is now known as the Hill of Howth—a Danish word. It is one of the few Irish names recorded by Ptolemy which can now be identified.

212. Carn=cairn. Ferguson quotes from Procopius a similar practice of the Persians when starting on a campaign, but they used arrows, not stones.

239. Taltin, now corrupted to Teltown, was the scene of a great annual fair with athletic games and sports, attended by people from the whole of Ireland and from Scotland.

276. Another poem of Ferguson's tells the story of Deirdre (pronounced Dare-drä). Maeve (l. 282) was a queen of Connacht who carried on a long struggle against Conor of Ulster.

331. *Sidhs* (pronounced shees) means fairy hills, into which the Tuatha De Danaans (l. 374) and other mythical inhabitants of Ireland were supposed to have retired and become fairies. The word *sidh* is also used for fairy, as in the well-known "banshee" or female fairy.

333. Cuchullin (pronounced Cōo hōo-lān) is the Achilles of Irish legend (l. 409, 718). He was the greatest of the Red Branch Knights of Ulster (see on l. 413).

355. So in the *Iliad* the spear is said to rage in its holder's hands, and long to glut itself with flesh. The Tuatha De Danaans (see on l. 331) had the reputation of being great metal workers and wizards. *Lann* means a blade.

391. Wayland Smith is Wieland, the Tubalcain of Norse legend. A cromlech in the Vale of the White Horse, in Berkshire, is still pointed out as his forge. *Lochlann*=Norse.

413. The Red Branch was a military order or brotherhood of Ulster warriors. Their House was near Emain (see on l. 97), and the local name of Creeve roe (Red Branch) still preserves the memory of their order.

422. Ferguson's poem *Mesgedra* relates this episode.

430. Druth=bufloocn.

484 ff. Of the king of the Burgundians Gibbon relates that "the injustice of his subjects made him responsible for the fertility of the earth and the regularity of the seasons." This is a widely-believed function of kings, from the rainmakers of West Africa to George IV. of England, who is said to have "prided himself particularly on the recent excellent harvest." The Japanese generals ascribed their success against Russia to "the virtues of the Mikado."

713. *Bricrin* was the name of Conal Carnach's shield, "blood-red, speckled with rivets of white bronze between plates of gold."

794. The stream was the Dodder, near Dublin; the place is now called Bohernabreena, the last two syllables giving the pronunciation of *bruidin* (guest house). The original of *Conary* may be read in vol. xxii of the *Revue Celtique*. Its perusal fills one with admiration for Ferguson's constructive power.

## QUESTIONS AND SUBJECTS FOR ESSAYS.

### I. THE EVE OF ST. AGNES.

1. Paraphrase "for" (l. 2). Cf. line 104.
2. Comment on "woolly fold" (l. 4), and "dumb orat'ries" (l. 16).
3. Explain fully the word "beadsman," and the phrase "told his rosary," comparing line 377.
4. Write a note on "degrees" (l. 13), contrasting line 229.
5. Why are the rails in line 15 called purgatorial?
6. Explain clearly the effect of the music on the beadsman. Was the object of his penance single or two-fold?
7. Does "silver" (l. 31) contradict "golden" in line 20? Write a note on "snarling."
8. Write a note on "hood-wink'd" (l. 70). What is the old meaning of "wink"?
9. Why does Keats spell "faery" so? Cf. line 168.
10. What is the usual meaning of "buttressed"? What does it mean in line 77?
11. Why did Madeline's relations object to Porphyro?
12. How does Angela show her weakness of soul?
13. Write a note on "gossip" (l. 105).
14. What historical event illustrates line 119?
15. Parse "deceive" (l. 125). Write a note on "mickle."
16. What is the usual meaning of the verb "brook"? What must it mean in line 133?
17. Contrast line 134 with 126.
18. What time is pointed to in line 147?
19. Comment on the use of "beard" in line 153.
20. Explain, word by word, "beteide her weal or woe" (l. 162).
21. Write notes on "needs" (l. 179) and "amain" (l. 188).

22. What is the construction of "hand" (l. 190)? Cf. line 226.
23. Show how the word "rose" (l. 193) surpasses in effect its prose equivalent.
24. Explain line 216; and "gules" (l. 218). Why did Keats not write "red"?
25. Why "poppied" (l. 237)?
26. What is a misal? Explain clearly line 241.
27. Explain lines 257, 277, 288, 349, and 366.
28. Where did the fringe come from (l. 285)?
29. Write notes on "argosy" (268), "alarm" (323), "arras" (358), "deform" (376).
30. Comment on the syntax of line 377.

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1. Point out the principal effects of contrast in this poem. Of what use is the beadsman?
2. Contrast this tale of young love with Shakespeare's treatment of the subject in *Romeo and Juliet*.
3. Show how this poem illustrates the meaning of the word "romantic" as applied to literature.
4. Enumerate and trace out in detail the similes.
5. Some of Keats's mannerisms are (1) making adverbs from present participles by adding -ly, (2) making adjectives from nouns by adding -ed, (3) using verbs as nouns. Illustrate these.
6. Keats once wrote: "I look upon fine phrases like a lover." Pick out some of the finest from this poem.

## II. MORTE D'ARTHUR.

1. What figure of speech occurs in line 3?
2. Make a sketch-plan to illustrate lines 8-12. Write a note on "strait."
3. Illustrate the use of "water" in line 12.
4. What cognate word would a prose writer use for "sequel" in line 14?
5. Explain "unsolders" (l. 14), and mention some similar metaphors.
6. Explain line 22. What do you know of Merlin?
7. Parse "noon" (l. 29).
8. Comment on "middle mere" (l. 37).

9. Write notes on "hest" (45), "haft" (56), "fealty" (75), "lief" (80), "chased" (86), "conceit" (110), "offe<sup>as</sup>s" (125).
10. What does "and" join in line 46?
11. Examine the expression of line 55.
12. Explain "many-knotted waterflags" (l. 63). What do you notice about the next line?
13. Parse "seeing" (l. 94), "but" (l. 99), "like" (l. 127), "for" (l. 129).
14. Of whom is Bedivere thinking in lines 107, 108?
15. Explain "now" in line 109. Cf. *Sohrab and Rustum* (363).
16. Explain in detail lines 139-141. What do you know of the origin of the aurora borealis, and of icebergs?
17. With what other lines is 147 contrasted, in sense and rhythm?
18. Is line 164 superior in expression to its prose equivalent?
19. What was the "cry" of line 184?
20. Write a note on the sound and rhythm of lines 176-192.
21. Write a note on "dry" of sounds (l. 186). Why "long" (l. 192)?
22. Explain lines 217, 218; 232, 233; 263.
23. Explain and illustrate lines 240, 242.
24. What belief is glanced at in line 267? What are "swarthy webs"?
25. Have you noticed one line of doubtful taste in this all but perfect poem?
26. What three indications are there that Sir Bedivere expected to live long?
27. Analyse into clauses lines 27-33; 152-156.
28. Paraphrase lines 88-109; 121-132.

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1. Compare the Arthur of this poem with the character elaborated in the later Idylls.
2. Write a short essay on the Round Table.
3. Write a character sketch of Sir Bedivere.
4. Show how the scenery and surroundings harmonise with the action. Contrast the poem, in this respect, with *The Eve of St. Agnes*.
5. Collect and comment on the lines and passages in which the sound gives "an echo to the sense."

6. Comparing line 127 with *Sohrab and Rustum* (457), consider how far such expressions are justified, dramatically or otherwise.

### III. SOHRAB AND RUSTUM.

1. Make a map showing the course of the Oxus, and including Pamere, Samarcand, Khiva, Elburz, Khorassan, Aral Sea.
2. Comment on the construction of lines 1-11, and compare 94-103.
3. At what time of the year does the action take place?
4. Of what shape were the Tartar tents (l. 12)?
5. What is the construction of "sleep" (l. 29)?
6. What is the force of "many" in line 61?
7. Write notes on "frøre" (115), "at gaze" (210), "dight" (277), "tale" (288), "swath" (293), "perused" (311).
8. What is the connexion between climate and "temperance" (l. 121)? Give examples.
9. Explain line 127.
10. What do you notice in line 140? Cf. line 696.
11. Why "pearled" (l. 155)?
12. What do you understand by "chok'd by the air" (l. 165)?
13. Account for Rustum's sullenness (l. 179).
14. What later line explains "plain arms" (l. 257)? Write a note on the custom.
15. Explain "fluted spine."
16. Comment on the use of "then" in line 363.
17. Why "on his feet" (l. 379)?
18. What is the simile in line 402?
19. Write a note on lines 410-415.
20. Comment on "angry spears" (l. 439), and "broke away" (l. 456).
21. Comment on line 508. .
22. What case is "heart" (l. 543)?
23. Write notes on "eyrie" (l. 565), "bruited" (l. 596), "style" (l. 613), "star" (l. 781).
24. What point is there in "at the full moon" (l. 618)?
25. Comment on "an emperor's gift" (l. 674).
26. What other animal nurses have you heard of? Cf. *Atalanta's Race* (161).
27. Illustrate line 794 from Gray's *Elegy*.

28. What common superstition is embodied in lines 829-834?
29. Explain "that" (l. 888), and "new-bathed" (l. 891).
30. Show that the river, in this famous passage, is personified.
31. Analyse into clauses lines 12-15, 42-45, 154-159, 605-609, 809-815.
32. Paraphrase lines 65-93, and give in your own words the story of Sohrab's birth and up-bringing.

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1. Write a short essay on famous single combats, showing their points of likeness and of contrast
2. Show how natural phenomena are used to heighten the interest of the action.
3. Give instances, from this and other poems, of the effective use of geographical names; and try to find why they are effective.
4. Write a short essay on the use of tragic irony.
5. What is the use of the Oxus in the poem? Can you compare it to anything in *The Eve of St. Agnes*?
6. Why do poets use similes? Arnold has been blamed for his "direct imitation of the similes of the Homeric poems, and of their way of introducing similes" which "weaken the passion of the poem and delay its movement." Do you agree?
7. Would Rustum have found happiness in the fulfilment of the wish expressed in lines 236-241? Illustrate his feeling from modern life. Contrast Tennyson's *Ulysses*.

#### IV. ATALANTA'S RACE.

1. How is line 14 connected in sense with what precedes?
2. Explain lines 18 and 19.
3. Write notes on "teeming" (30), "fain" (152), "course" (186), "must" (224), "chaffering" (254), "equal" (336), "murk" (363), "close" (365), "toils" (403), "wrack" (457), "scrip" (526).
4. What would the weapon be in line 34? Cf. line 223.
5. Who were the mothers (l. 38), and why did they low?
6. Explain line 42.
7. Comment on the form of expression in lines 55 and 56.
8. Who is the Fleet-foot One (line 63)? and why is the image silver?
9. What is the antecedent of "who" in line 82? and of "that" in line 91?

10. What is the most notorious illustration of line 84?
11. What old belief is glanced at in the word "shapeless" (l. 161).
12. Who is the sea-born one (l. 184)? Cf. lines 282 and 386.
13. Parse fully "as" in line 186.
14. Who were Dryads (l. 206), and Adonis' bane (l. 208)?
15. What had "pride" (l. 27) got to say to it?
16. Who is the three-formed goddess (l. 275)?
17. What word is omitted in line 279? Cf. line 473.
18. What is "sad hardihead" (l. 291)? What is meant by its "firm abode"?
19. Comment on the use of "now" in lines 313 and 343.
20. Where has the metaphor of line 341 appeared already?
21. Explain line 357. Also line 360.
22. Parse "made" in line 387. What is the object of incense in worship?
23. Between what two words does "among" (l. 393) express the relation?
24. What is the object of "hear"? (l. 428).
25. Where has the fancy of line 452 appeared already? Read Blanco White's sonnet *To Night*.
26. Why "twice" (l. 464)?
27. What English word marks the connexion of roses with Damascus (l. 513)?
28. Explain line 535, comparing line 427.
29. Explain lines 663, 664.
30. Analyse into clauses lines 188, 189, 218-224, 456-462, 484-490.
31. Paraphrase lines 204-210, 225-231, 393-396.

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1. Show how Morris has mediævalised the classical tale.
2. Describe an Olympic festival.
3. How far is our public school education affected by Greek ideals?
4. Describe Venus' temple and its situation, in your own words.
5. Compose Atalanta's prayer to Diana, in the style of Milanion's to Venus.
6. Write a note on Morris's attitude to external nature.

## V. CONARY.

1. What is the construction of "Alba sack'd" (l. 22)? Cf line 150.
2. What was the outrage (l. 25)?
3. State very briefly the characters of the five brothers.
4. Illustrate the phrase "Cualann-ward" (l. 76).
5. What fuel is meant in line 90?
6. Comment on the use of "nothing" (l. 98).
7. What is the point of lines 118-122?
8. Paraphrase "but" in line 146. Cf. line 344.
9. What beasts are meant in line 154?
10. Express line 170 in prose.
11. What does "still" mean in line 189?
12. Account for the involved construction of lines 194 and 200.
13. How was the trial made (l. 218)?
14. Write a note on "adamant" (l. 301).
15. Parse "exaggerate" (l. 306), and mention some similar forms.
16. Explain "stops of music" (l. 337).
17. Explain "of an edge to slice the hair on water" (l. 352). What test does Saladin in *The Talisman* use of his sword's edge?
18. What word is omitted in line 446?
19. Indicate the three harvests of line 492 in your own words.
20. What are the imperatives of lines 529 ff. equivalent to?
21. Explain "act" in line 530. What do you understand by the terms legislature and executive?
22. What four classes, according to Lomna, minister to the loftier life of a nation?
23. Explain "airy rhetoric" (l. 545).
24. Explain lines 599, 600.
25. What is a pibroch (l. 664)?
26. Parse "but" (l. 759).
27. Comment on "approached" (l. 865), and "samplers" (l. 873).
28. Analyse into clauses lines 73-79, 340-344, 530.

29. How would a prose writer give the sense of lines 1-23?
30. Paraphrase lines 64-70, 590-613.
31. Paraphrase lines 275-285 in a series of simple sentences, arranged in historical order.

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1. "A long poem is a test of invention, which I take to be the Polar Star of Poetry, as Fancy is the sails—and Imagination the rudder." Explain and illustrate this remark of Keats.
2. Compare the dialogue between the scout, Ingcel and Ferragon with the dialogue between Helen and the Trojan chiefs in the third book of the *Iliad*.
3. What is meant by an "epic" poem? How does it differ from a "narrative" poem? Did Tennyson write any epic?
4. A modern poet in telling an old tale is likely to import ideas foreign to the time of which he writes. Illustrate this from *Morte d'Arthur* and *Conary*.
5. What do you know of the ancient civilization of Ireland and its sudden collapse?
6. Which of the five poems in this book do you prefer? Give your reasons.

## HELPS TO FURTHER STUDY.

1. Some valuable notes on *The Eve of St. Agnes* will be found in Hales' *Longer English Poems* (Macmillan).
2. For notes on *Morte d'Arthur* see *English Idylls and other Poems*, edited by J. H. Fowler, or *The Coming of Arthur and The Passing of Arthur*, edited by F. J. Rowe, in Macmillan's "English Classics for Schools." Malory's *Morte Darthur* is published in the "Globe Edition."
3. For *Sohrab and Rustum* see the notes by G. C. Macaulay in *Selections from Arnold* ("English Classics," Macmillan). A version of Firdausi's work will be found in the "Chandos Classics" (F. Warne), and a simplified version in *A Persian Hero* in this series.
4. For the gods and other characters in *Atalanta's Race*, consult a Classical Dictionary.
5. *Lays of the Red Branch* ("The New Irish Library," Fisher Unwin) tells several of the Tales to which allusion is made in *Conary*, and an estimate of Ferguson's work will be found in Stopford Brooke and Rolleston's *Treasury of Irish Poetry in the English Tongue* (Smith & Elder).

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